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EQUIPPING LIFE GROUP LEADERS TO PROVIDE BIBLICAL
COUNSELING AT BELLEVUE BAPTIST
CHURCH, CORDOVA, TENNESSEE

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EQUIPPING LIFE GROUP LEADERS TO PROVIDE BIBLICAL
COUNSELING AT BELLEVUE BAPTIST
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PREFACE

A project of this magnitude represents contributions from many people. First, I want to express my appreciation to the excellent teachers with whom I have been privileged to study what Scripture declares about biblical counseling. Through Dr. Stuart Scott's wisdom and encouragement, I have come to a deeper understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling. Dr. Heath Lambert has walked with me and mentored me as I have sought to apply that truth in practice.

Second, I am grateful to the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue Baptist Church for feedback, prayers, and constant encouragement throughout this project.

Third, I want to thank Dr. Steve Gaines and Dr. Russ Quinn for their encouragement, prayers, and admonitions to press on. I also want to thank Mike Clark, who led me to Christ and has prayed for me daily in the years and decades that have followed.

Fourth, God has surrounded me with a supportive family who has selflessly invested in my life. I want to thank my parents, Jim and Nannie Street for their love and support. I am in the Kingdom because of the prayers of my mother. I also want to thank my in-laws, John and Pat Caldwell for their prayers, support, for fixing things around the house that broke and for many, many meals throughout the past thirty years, but especially over the course of this project. I want to thank our sons, Jonathan and Matthew, for encouraging me and for fixing the computer when I broke it.

I want to thank my lovely wife, Dayna, without whose tireless work this degree and project would not have happened. She discussed the overall themes and every word of this project with me. I see and hear her on every page. I do not have the words to express how grateful I am for her involvement. She is a trooper.

Finally, if there is anything of worthiness in this project, the praise for it goes to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Wonderful Counselor. He has brought me from darkness to light and from death unto life.

William Robert Street

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project will be to equip Life Group leaders at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee, to counsel members of their Life Group from a biblical perspective.

Goals

This project had five goals which measured the efficacy of this project. The first goal was to increase awareness in Life Group leaders of the command to be engaged in the ministry of biblical counseling. All members in the body of Christ are commanded by God to be involved in helping others mature in Christ. Biblical counseling is not merely for the clergy or specially trained people, but for every believer. Many Christians are unaware of the biblical command to counsel others and are uncertain how to address counseling issues. As a result, they often walk away from people, instead of moving towards them. Mature Christians must become convinced that it is God's will that they engage people who are dealing with issues of sin and disobedience.

The second goal was to see Life Group leaders grow in their confidence to counsel. Through the new birth, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God, believers possess the spiritual competence to address the issues God addresses in His Word. Christians are

to move confidently in Christ's power toward the sins and struggles they encounter in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ. They are purposefully to minister to others, not allowing the sinful attitudes and patterns of suffering to deter them.

The third goal of this project was to equip Life Group leaders to address the core issues of biblical counseling, engendering in these leaders a vision of counseling that deals with the entire person: both heart and behavior. While believers are called to obedience, biblical counseling recognizes behavior change flowing from the heart is God's ultimate goal. The effectiveness of the first three goals were evaluated by a pre- and post-training questionnaire (see the appendix).

The fourth goal was to develop a curriculum to train Life Group leaders to counsel members of their Life Group from a biblical perspective. At Bellevue, Life Groups are structured to have inreach and outreach leaders and are challenged to be involved in the evangelism, bereavement, benevolent, and prayer needs of their members. However, at the present time, the church does not have a curriculum to address counseling issues in Life Groups. This project met that need.

The fifth goal was personal. As a result of this project, I wanted to enhance my ability to teach the biblical principles that address the issues of life. The prophet Hosea said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). The church body needs to know the truths that biblical counseling entails. I hoped to develop my teaching capabilities to promote effective student learning and involvement.

Ministry Context

The context for this project was Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee. Bellevue is a church with a rich tradition spanning more than a century. In

1903, Bellevue Avenue Baptist Church was founded as a mission church on the outskirts of Memphis, Tennessee. As the city grew, the church also prospered in what is now the midtown part of the city. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, many of Bellevue's members moved to the suburbs of Memphis, and Bellevue was no longer considered a neighborhood church. In 1989, under the leadership of then Pastor Adrian Rogers, the church relocated to Cordova, Tennessee, a suburb of Memphis, making it closer to 60 percent of the membership.¹

Memphis is located in the southwest corner of Tennessee bordered by Arkansas to the west and Mississippi to the south. The largest city in the state, Memphis has an estimated population of 602,458.² The greater Memphis metropolitan area, including adjacent counties in Mississippi and Arkansas, has an estimated population of 1,296,067 representing 492,509 households. The ethnic distribution of the metropolitan community is 48.7 percent White, 45.6 percent Black, 3.7 percent Hispanic, and 1.9 percent Asian. The median age of a resident in the Memphis metropolitan area is 35.3, with 47.2 percent of the population ranging from 20 to 54 years old.³

Bellevue's resident membership of 15,410 individuals, 59 percent of whom are between the ages of 21 and 59, lives predominantly in Shelby, Fayette, and Tipton counties in Tennessee and Desoto County in Mississippi.⁴ Currently the total church

¹Cyndi Richardson, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Cordova, TN: Bellevue Baptist Church, 2003), 240.

²City of Memphis Demographics. "Demographic Detail Summary Report" [on-line]; accessed 5 January 2011; available from http://memphischamber.com/articles/dobusiness/pdfMemphis_MSA_Demographics.aspx; Internet.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

membership including resident and non-resident members is 28,947. The majority of the adult membership can be classified as professionals, with a large number having a bachelor's degree or beyond. In the greater Memphis metropolitan area, only 15.8 percent of the residents have a bachelor's degree.⁵ The disparity between the educational and income levels of the church membership and the Memphis community as a whole has given Bellevue the label by some of being a "country club" church.

Since its inception, Bellevue's mission has been to reach people in the Memphis metropolitan area and across the world with the good news of Christ. The conduit to reach the masses has been the proclamation of the gospel through the steadfast preaching of the pastors. Bellevue has had seven pastors during its 108 year history; since 1927, the church has been led by only four pastors. One of the most notable orators of the twentieth century, Robert Greene Lee, served as pastor from 1927 to 1960. During his ministry, the church grew from a membership of 1,430 to 9,200, making Bellevue the second largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention at the time of his resignation.⁶ Under Lee's leadership, Bellevue became the first church in the world to broadcast a worship service live. In 1960, William Ramsey Pollard became the fifth pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. Early in his pastorate, the church withstood a period of turmoil as several hundred members left the church in opposition to Pollard. Pollard wisely modeled forgiveness for the congregation; God healed the division in the church and built a stronger fellowship among the thousands of members who remained. During his twelve year ministry at Bellevue, Pollard was known as a loving pastor who spent

⁵Ibid.

⁶Richardson, *Grace and Glory*, 67.

many hours counseling, visiting, and praying for the members of his congregation.⁷

After Pollard resigned in 1972, Bellevue called Adrian Pierce Rogers to pastor the church. Under his strong leadership and pulpit ministry, the church grew from a membership of 8,739 to over 28,000 members.⁸ Rogers led the church to move to its current location along Interstate 40 in northeast Shelby County. After Rogers's retirement in 2005, Bellevue voted to call John Steven Gaines as its seventh and current pastor.

As Pollard experienced dissension in the church following Lee, Gaines also underwent a season of turmoil following Rogers' retirement and death. Life Group attendance dropped from an average of 7,402 in Gaines's first year as pastor to 4,585 in 2009. However, in 2009 the church began to experience numerical growth with attendance in worship services increasing from an average of 6,352 in 2009 to 6,549 in 2010.

The ministry of Bellevue reaches people from all over the Mid-South region. The Sunday morning telecast of the worship services as well as the location of the church on the interstate, with its three 120-150 foot tall crosses, makes it the best known church in the area. In addition, large events such as The Singing Tree, The Memphis Passion Play, and the Fourth of July Starlight Spectacular are targeted to reach the community for Christ, and thousands of people attend these annual functions.

Bellevue sits on 377 beautifully landscaped acres. It has a worship center which holds over 7,500 people. The facilities total 620,000 square feet. On average, over six thousand people attend the two morning worship services, and over 4,500

⁷Ibid., 84-85.

⁸Ibid., 92.

people attend Life Groups on Sunday morning. In July 2007, Bellevue Baptist was named one of the top fifty most influential churches in the country.⁹

The ministry emphasis at Bellevue has changed dramatically during Gaines's pastorate. Under Rogers, the church was noted for its preaching and teaching ministry. Rogers said, "If you will get them here [to church], I'll disciple the people from the pulpit."¹⁰ Gaines has sought to transition the church to a discipling, equipping, and worshiping ministry. Gaines views discipleship as a one on one reproduction process achieved through purposeful godly relationships. Gaines's ministry is marked by godly transparency. He is open both privately and publically about personal struggles. People are drawn to this sincerity and find it easy to relate to the man standing behind the pulpit.

In 2007, Gaines strategically led Bellevue to begin a new outreach emphasis, "Bellevue Loves Memphis." The phrase was birthed from the sad distinction of Memphis being known as a city that is at the forefront in the country for incidents of crime and murder. A municipality divided along racial lines, there was little love lost on the neighborhoods where drugs, violence, and poverty were prevalent. During a conversation centered on how to reach Memphis for Christ, someone remarked to Gaines, "No one loves Memphis." Gaines replied, "Jesus loves Memphis and Bellevue loves Memphis."¹¹ While the church had previously been involved in overseas missions, local missions had not received as much attention. Through this emphasis, Bellevue now has four work days a year in which hundreds of church members go into the community to

⁹Lay Guy, "America's Top 50 Influential Churches" [on-line]; accessed 17 January 2011; available from <http://layguy.com/2007/07/26/americas-top-50-influential-churches>; Internet.

¹⁰From a Bellevue staff meeting in 2008.

¹¹From a conversation with Steve Gaines in 2007.

serve. In addition, the church has three satellite churches which minister to a diverse population and a dental van that provides free dental care throughout the city. Bellevue is becoming known as a church that loves Memphis and is willing to put that love into action throughout the city.

My wife and I attended Bellevue during my years as a seminary student at Mid-America Baptist Seminary. I was also ordained at Bellevue in 1986. After being the senior pastor at three churches and serving as a senior staff member at another church, I joined the staff at Bellevue in the summer of 2006. I serve as one of three ministers of biblical counseling at Bellevue. The counseling ministry at Bellevue is composed of three full time ministers and two female counselors.

Jamie Fish, who heads the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue, is a graduate of Mid-America Baptist Seminary and has been at the church for over twenty years. When he first served in the Biblical Counseling Ministry, Fish had an integrationist perspective, having been taught that approach in seminary. However, after Fish was exposed to some books from The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, he became convinced of the veracity of biblical counseling and moved away from an integrationist approach. Currently, all of the ministers and the two women who counsel are committed to biblical counseling.

The counseling staff at Bellevue sees people on a scheduled basis Monday through Thursday. During an average day, I have six 50 minute counseling sessions. On Wednesday, the number of sessions usually increases to eight. Approximately 50 percent of the people I counsel are non-Bellevue members. Typically, we only see counselees six to eight times. Biblical counseling is a ministry of Bellevue, and no money is charged for

the service.

Rationale

While the twenty-first century church looks for new strategies and approaches to ministry, only one approach follows a biblical model: men bringing other men to maturity in Christ. Paul explains this approach, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col 1:28-29).¹² Explaining the role of biblical counseling in this process John MacArthur writes,

Ever since apostolic times, counseling has occurred in the church as a natural function of corporate spiritual life. After all, the New Testament itself *commands* believers to “admonish one another” (Rom 15:14); “encourage one another” (Heb 3:13 KJV); “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18).¹³

E. M. Bounds juxtaposes God’s strategy of utilizing men to bring other men to maturity with the techniques employed by the church, “The church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men.”¹⁴ The purpose of the church is not simply about bringing men to Christ, but bringing them to maturity in Him.

The pastor and the leadership of Bellevue Baptist Church recognize the need to establish a biblical counseling training program that is patterned after the New Testament example of redemptive relationships. Paul explains the idea of redemptive relationships in 1 Thessalonians:

¹²Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are New American Standard Bible, 1995 updated.

¹³John MacArthur, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 4.

¹⁴E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 5.

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:7-12)

Often, the kingdom of God enters into the lives of people through the involvement of mature believers who exhort and encourage them to walk in biblical obedience. If Bellevue is to experience the type of ministry Paul describes in the area of biblical counseling, it will take place primarily through Life Groups. As issues such as discouragement, addictions, and fear are recognized, not as psychological problems or simply a product of stress, but as an expression of self-centered and sinful living, the body of Christ at Bellevue will become a church who “. . . causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:17).

The need for a biblical counseling training program designed to bring other believers to maturity in Christ is not unique to Bellevue. Universally, redemptive change is the answer for every problem encountered by believers. The change God desires is not a surface modification; it is a change that takes place from the heart outward. Jesus admonished the people of His day because of their religious façade, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me” (Matt 15:8). The transformation God intends for His children begins in the heart, the place where God is worshipped, yet sin is often hidden. God’s prescription for dealing with the concealment of sin is for the body to effectively minister to one another, exhorting each other toward redemptive change so that none “will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13).

As redemptive change occurs within the heart of the believer, he will become less self-centered and more Christ-centered. However, this transformation goes against the selfishness inherent in man's base nature. Paul comments on the rarity of the pursuit of a Christ-centered life in his remarks to the Philippians about Timothy, "For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:20, 21). The twenty-first century church must denounce the tendency toward self-oriented living as noted by Paul Tripp: "A truly effective ministry of the Word must confront our self-focus and self-absorption at its roots, opening up the vastness of a God-defined, God-centered world. Unless this happens, we will use the promises, principles, and commands of the Word to serve the thing we really love: ourselves."¹⁵ The call from self-centered focus to Christ-centered living is a message that needs to be consistently communicated as believers are trained in biblical counseling.

It is imperative for biblical counselors to understand that this change will only transpire as the believer abides in a deep relationship with Christ. John explains the necessity of an abiding relationship in Christ, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). As the believer immerses himself in Christ, he will walk in the spiritual power which yields a Christ-centered life that will bear fruit and bring glory to God.

One of the challenges Bellevue Baptist Church faces is to equip our members

¹⁵Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 24-25.

to engage believers in this kind of change. This process of maturity is the purpose of Bellevue and every New Testament church. Although biblical fidelity, doctrinal integrity, evangelistic passion, and the imperative of missions are hallmarks at Bellevue, having a laity that is trained to give biblical counsel to other believers has been a weakness. At Bellevue, when Life Group leaders encounter believers struggling with issues or life-dominating sins such as discouragement, fear, pornography, addiction to drugs or alcohol, or marital issues, they are usually referred to the Biblical Counseling Ministry of the church. The Life Group leaders do not see themselves as “competent to counsel” those with attitudes and actions that are clearly defined by the Bible as sin.

Additionally, while the church leadership shuns secular counseling, there has not been a discernable grasp of the differences between integrationist and biblical counseling among the members of the staff or the congregation. Over the years Bellevue has had counseling and family life conferences led by Larry Crabb, Dan Allendar, Gary Smalley, and Dennis Rainey. Recently, Bellevue hosted a *Love and Respect* conference, led by Emerson Eggerichs. This project was designed to respond to the need to train Life Group leaders to counsel solely from a biblical perspective, addressing the underlying heart motives of sinful attitudes and actions.

The focus of this project was to develop Life Group leaders who are aware that they are competent to counsel and to train them to counsel from a biblical viewpoint, fulfilling the responsibility of the leadership in the body of Christ. Paul explains,

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13)

While Bellevue Baptist Church is in many ways a mature church, as Life Group leaders are equipped to biblically address the heart issues of sin the church will take another step forward in seeing its members experience fullness of life in Christ.

Definitions

Since this project was under the umbrella of the biblical counseling program of Southern Seminary and sought to address biblical counseling at Bellevue Baptist Church, the first term that must be defined is *biblical counseling*.

Biblical counseling is a complex term, meaning different things to different people. Heath Lambert clearly states the fundamental aspect regarding the term: “Biblical counseling is distinguished from every other approach to counseling (secular or Christian) by its firm belief that Scripture alone is sufficient to help people with their problems.”¹⁶ David Powlison describes biblical counseling with two different meanings in view. He writes, “These different meanings exist in tension. On the one hand ‘biblical counseling’ is a *goal* to live and die for. On the other hand, ‘biblical counseling’ is a *current achievement*, partial and imperfect like all human achievements.”¹⁷ Biblical counseling is centered in Christ, yet is conducted with people encumbered in daily struggle. These people are frequently bogged down in sinful attitudes and actions.

John Piper passionately portrays biblical counseling as “God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted,

¹⁶Heath Lambert, “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 137.

¹⁷David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 257.

Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people.”¹⁸ It must be stressed that biblical counseling is not about simply solving problems, or trying to help people experience a satisfying life; biblical counseling is centered in the cross of Christ. In summary, biblical counseling is defined as the goal to see a believer live under the Lordship of Christ, the instruction of Scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of God.

The second term to define is *Life Groups*. The ministry Bellevue formerly termed Sunday School and later, Bible Fellowship, is now called *Life Groups*. The church has adopted this term believing it removes the hindrances associated by some people with “school.” The leadership also believes this name captures the dynamic of “life” that the terms Sunday School and Bible Fellowship do not.

Limitations and Delimitations

The primary limitation for this project was the time limit of fifteen weeks. While individuals can be exposed to much knowledge in this period, one realizes that it takes a longer time for people to grasp the truths that are presented, apply them to their lives, and learn how to communicate them from their heart to the hearts and lives of others.

The first delimitation established for this project was limiting the subject matter to an overview of biblical counseling as well as six specific problem areas. A plethora of spiritual issues could have been addressed. However, due to the scope and goals of this project, it was determined that limiting the number of issues to six was most

¹⁸John Piper, “God’s Glory is the Goal of Biblical Counseling.” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (2002): 8-21.

appropriate.

The second delimitation was in regard to the participants who were to be engaged in this endeavor. Participants were members of Bellevue Baptist Church and were active members of a Life Group. In addition, they were approved by their Life Group leader to participate in this project. Participants possessed the characteristics of a mature believer and either had expressed a specific desire to be trained in biblical counseling or be actively involved in building redemptive relationships.

Research Methodology

The project attempted to equip leaders in adult Life Groups with the competency and confidence to biblically address the issues people face. Since Bellevue has over 120 adult Life Groups, only select classes from the adult department were chosen for this project. Eight to twelve teachers selected two people from their classes who have either expressed a desire to grow in their understanding of biblical counseling or have the evidences of being a person filled with the Holy Spirit and spiritual wisdom. While these spiritual characteristics are often associated with the office of a deacon, they are also qualities associated with Bezalel, the craftsman who made the tent of meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, and the mercy seat (Exod 31:1-11). The spiritual workmanship that is needed to construct a material building is the same type of spiritual skill needed to build or rebuild a life or a marriage.

One week before the first class, each participant was given a pre-training questionnaire. This questionnaire sought to measure the participant's prior knowledge in two areas. First, it gauged their involvement with people who have spiritual struggles, their willingness to counsel when it is beyond their comfort zone, and their confidence in

God's Word to counsel others. Second, the questionnaire evaluated the participants in the six specific areas selected for the study. Those areas were marriage, discouragement, fear, addictions, anger, and forgiveness. Specifically, the questionnaire measured (1) the participants level of competency in addressing the particular life issue, (2) their knowledge of both the heart of the problem and the steps to take to address the issue biblically, (3) their knowledge of the specific biblical principles to apply in a counseling situation, and (4) their understanding of the truth that total obedience is the life to which God calls His children.

The eleven weeks of instruction began with two sessions regarding the imperative of the body of Christ to biblically admonish one another. In the first session, participants were taught Paul's declaration that Christians are "able to admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). Bellevue members tend to understand that lost people act like lost people because they are unconverted. Those who are spiritually mature enough to share Christ do not usually allow a person's attitudes, words, dress, or demeanor to deter them from sharing the gospel of Christ with that person. However, members sometime allow how a Christian speaks, how he relates to others, his attitude, and the number of failures he has experienced in a particular area to affect their willingness to engage someone for the purpose of addressing their behavior. In the second session, the class was instructed on the unlimited resources believers have in Christ. Through the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, God works in His children's hearts to enable them to comprehend their identity in Christ and to grow in their sanctification in Him.

The subsequent three class meetings addressed biblical change and biblical counseling concepts. While sin is consistently denounced, Life Group leaders often do

not counsel others on addressing the heart issues of self-centeredness, genuine repentance, their identity in Christ, and learning to put on Christlike character and put off sinful patterns of living.

The instruction for the next six weeks concentrated on six specific areas: marriage, discouragement, fear, addictions, anger, and forgiveness. These issues were approached from a biblical perspective. Since, however, Bellevue members have been exposed to integrationist teaching in the past, this approach was also examined and its weaknesses exposed. The six areas selected are the ones most often encountered in the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue.

During the fourteenth week, a post-training questionnaire was administered. This assessment was identical to the pre-training questionnaire. By comparing the two instruments, I evaluated the effectiveness of the biblical counseling equipping class.

The fifteenth week was utilized to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the class and determine changes needed to increase its effectiveness.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The final authority in life is the Word of God. Paul declares, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17). While God’s Word is the rule for all, it is only the child of God who has the spiritual ability to discern and follow its truth.¹ The “teaching, reproof, correction, and training” referred to in 2 Timothy addresses the gamut of life’s struggles the believer may experience.

Problems are a part of life. Believers are not immune to difficulties, experiencing the results of the fall along with the rest of mankind. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus instructed His followers, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Since the existence of difficulty is a theological fact, it is appropriate to consider the answers that Scripture provides to the problems believers face. How should a follower of Christ view the life issues he encounters?

God speaks to every facet of life. Abraham Kuyper attests to this truth: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who

¹“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (2 Cor 2:14).

is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”² Christ is Lord and He has declared how He wants issues of both sin and suffering addressed. The paradigm of counseling taught and modeled in the Word of God is correctly termed biblical counseling.³ While other forms of counseling are upheld by believers and unbelievers, it is biblical counseling alone which lines up with Scripture. Douglas Bookman describes some of the disciplines of biblical counseling:

The biblical counselor must be committed to a preeminently Godward focus in counseling. Why? There are three basic reasons: (1) because God demands it; (2) because the natural exaltation of self is destructive; and (3) because the soul-satisfying-life God intends for His children can only be found through Jesus’ spiritual paradox: deny self and focus on God.⁴

The declaration of Jesus, “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32) is the aim of biblical counseling.

While a myriad of passages could be examined, this chapter explores five passages of Scripture that speak both to what biblical counseling is and how it is accomplished. A study of these truths provides an understanding of biblical counseling.

The first passage concerning biblical counseling that will be discussed is found in Romans 15:14. In this passage, Paul teaches that God equips every Christian to be

²Abraham Kuyper, “Not a Square Inch” [on-line]; accessed 31 May 2011; available from <http://kuypersociety.blogspot.com/2006/02/not-square-inch.html>; Internet.

³Wayne Mack writes, “Counseling that is truly Christian must be Christ-centered, church-centered, and Bible-based. Various contemporary approaches to counseling question the sufficiency of Scripture, namely the two-book, the no-book, and the filtered device approaches. All three join in affirming that the traditional biblical resources for dealing with man’s problems are not enough. They fail to take into account, however, the finiteness of man’s knowledge, the depravity of human nature, and the sufficiency of Scripture. Psalm 19:7-11, 2 Timothy 3:15-17, and 2 Peter 1:2-7 affirm clearly the sufficiency of Scripture and Christ in dealing with man’s problems. Secular psychological principles are unnecessary and may even be harmful in trying to understand and help people.” Wayne Mack, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 9, no. 1 (1988): 63.

⁴Douglas Bookman, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 51.

competent in bringing others to maturity. Biblical counseling is not a ministry reserved merely for pastors or seminary graduates. God's design is that all of His children mature and minister to others.

The second passage is 2 Peter 1:2-4. God gives every Christian all they need for life and godliness. Christians have no need to go to the world or worldly philosophies for answers. God gives the truth and power to live an abundant life through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Second Corinthians 11:1-3 is the third passage inspected in this chapter. Here, Paul calls every Christian to have a sacred relationship with Christ. This intimacy with Christ is a reality that a believer must grasp if he is to experience the life God designs.

The fourth passage giving insight into an understanding of biblical counseling is Colossians 3:1-14. These verses boldly declare that God expects every Christian to live a life of active holiness, putting off sin and putting on Christ.

The fifth and final passage is Philippians 2:1-13. Basing his teaching on the pattern of the life of Christ, Paul challenges believers to turn from a life of self-exaltation to one of Christ-exaltation. It is only as one loses himself in the wonder of who Christ is and what He has done, that true life is experienced and ministry is accomplished.

An embrace of these passages will enable the reader to see that while the term biblical counseling is not found in Scripture, the principles it espouses--the competency of members in the body of Christ to counsel, the sufficiency of God and His Word to address the issues of life and godliness, the sacred relationship to which the believer is called, the imperative of putting off sin and putting on Christ, and the call to turn from a life of self-exaltation to Christ-exaltation--are clearly stated.

God Equips Every Christian to be Competent in Bringing Others to Maturity: Romans 15:14

Biblical counseling does not exist merely within the professional realm; it is the responsibility of every mature believer. This truth is seen in Paul's declaration to the believers in Rome, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). Paul's claim is that a Christian who is a mature believer, one filled with "goodness and knowledge," has the inherent spiritual ability to be used by God to help other believers come to maturity in Christ.⁵

Paul bases his assertion on a three-fold conviction. First, Paul is persuaded these Roman believers are filled with goodness. Second, he is convinced they are filled with all knowledge. Finally, because of their spiritual maturity, Paul proclaims the Christians in the church at Rome are able to admonish one another. As Paul makes these observations regarding the believers at Rome, he identifies the spiritual traits in mature believers which qualify them to give biblical counsel to others. A discussion of these characteristics will give insight into the competency of the believer to admonish or counsel those in need.

The first assertion Paul makes regarding the believers in Rome is that they are filled with goodness. He declares, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness" (Rom. 15:14). What is goodness? Goodness is not to be confused with mere kindness, a benevolent well wishing.

⁵Robert Mounce describes these Christians: "Morally, they were 'full of goodness,' intellectually they were 'complete in knowledge,' and functionally they were 'competent to counsel.'" Robert Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 266.

Goodness is the work of God in the human heart which produces a life of moral excellence that is pleasing to God; it is a Christlike life.⁶ It is important to recognize that man cannot be good or do good apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in his life. Paul states earlier in his letter to the Romans, “All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom 3:12). Everett Harrison notes that goodness is not part of man’s “native disposition, but the moral excellence wrought into the texture of life by the Spirit’s indwelling.”⁷ Goodness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a definitive proof of God’s maturing process in the life of the believer.

The presence of goodness in the life of the believer is a confirmation that they are competent to counsel others. The goodness Paul describes is not tepid and fearful; it is a commitment to offer counsel to benefit others even if it is necessary to speak sharp, blunt words which may appear like a rebuke or a warning.⁸ Goodness is seen in speaking truth that heals, although it may wound.⁹ The objective of the biblical counselor is to see Christlikeness reproduced in the life of the counselee.

The second trait Paul recognizes in the lives of the believers at Rome is that they are filled with knowledge. Biblical counseling is not simply being concerned about

⁶William Barclay comments, “The difficulty about the word *goodness* is that it takes its meaning from its context, and from the sphere in which the particular excellence described lies.” William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 102.

⁷Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 155.

⁸“*Agathosune* does not spare sharpness and rebuke to cause good in others where *chrestotes* demonstrates only its softness and benignity.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1960), 1796.

⁹See Prov 27:6.

the spiritual welfare of others; a biblical counselor must possess the knowledge to address the issues of those he counsels according to the truths of Scripture. Earlier in Romans, Paul comments on how zeal alone is not enough to accomplish the will of God.¹⁰ Similarly, biblical counseling must be accomplished according to knowledge of God's Word for it to be pleasing to Him. The apostle echoes the imperative of the Word of God and its relationship to biblical counseling in writing to the Christians at Colossae, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another" (Col 3:16). As the believer is filled with goodness and the knowledge of the Word of God, he is qualified to counsel others biblically.

Having noted the presence of goodness and knowledge in the lives of the Christians in the church at Rome, Paul makes a third observation regarding these believers, they possess the ability to admonish one another. The word Paul uses to define this ability is "δυναμις to be able, to have power."¹¹ Δυναμις is the inherent power and ability to do something. The Christian filled with goodness and knowledge has the capacity to give biblical counseling, something a lost person or a person who is spiritually immature cannot accomplish.

In utilizing the word admonish, Paul selects a rich and complex Greek word that is uncommon to the English language. A brief description of this word is necessary for the biblical counselor to understand what God expects of him. W. E. Vines defines admonish as, "Νουθεσια, a putting in mind (*nous*, mind, *tithemi*, to put) . . . *Nouthesia* is

¹⁰See Rom 10:1-3.

¹¹W. E. Vines, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985), in *PC Study Bible* [CD-ROM] (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1988-2008), s.v. "able."

‘training by word,’ whether of encouragement, or, if necessary, by reproof or remonstrance.”¹² The goal of the biblical counselor is to address the heart issues in the counselee that do not align with God’s Word and seek to persuade him to do what is right. Paul’s selection of the word *νουθετεω* emphasizes the importance of change occurring not only in the mind, but also in the will and disposition.¹³ The correction sought through biblical counseling is not simply behavior modification; it is a change that occurs from the heart outward to behavior. For the biblical counselor, to admonish is to lovingly, yet truthfully, declare the Word of God as it speaks to every situation. To admonish someone is not merely to offer an opinion, but to seek to convince someone to take a righteous course of action.

In Romans 15:14, Paul provides two essential, yet simple, qualifications necessary to counsel others in the body of Christ. First, a biblical counselor must be filled with goodness, a work of the Holy Spirit. This fruit of the Spirit produces a heart motivated by God to be actively engaged in seeking what is right and good. As a result, the biblical counselor will be committed to seeing the will of God accomplished in the lives of others. Second, the biblical counselor must be filled with knowledge. He has acquired the knowledge to address scripturally the problems faced by those he counsels. Finally, as a result of being filled with goodness and knowledge, the biblical counselor is competent to admonish other believers to pursue God’s will. He is actively involved in warning other believers to avoid what is wrong and exhorting them to pursue what is right. Admonishing describes the dynamic of the believers in the early Roman church;

¹²Ibid., s.v. “admonish.”

¹³Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), in *Logos Bible Software* [CD-ROM] (Bellingham, WA: Libronix Corporation, 1992-2007), 645.

admonishing is the design for every mature New Testament believer today.

God's design for mature believers, those filled with goodness and knowledge, is to be engaged in speaking the truth of God to others in the body of Christ. Answers to the problems faced by those seeking counsel are not found through worldly means or philosophies. God has given the believing counselor and counselee all they need for life and godliness through the knowledge of God. An examination of Peter's declaration regarding the sufficiency of Scripture through Christ confirms the adequacy of God's Word to address the problems people experience.

God Gives Christians All That They Need for Life and Godliness: 2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pet 1:2-4)

The apostle Peter writes as one who understands what it means to need hope. As one who three times denied Christ, after publicly declaring his loyalty, Peter is aware of the futility of sincere, but empty promises of faithfulness. Peter knows that human resolve is a faulty foundation upon which to build a life. However, he recognizes the power of God and comprehends that He is gracious and does not abandon His children who flounder, but instead provides all they need to live an abundant life. Four principles from Peter's words encourage and equip the believer to experience the life God desires for him. The first principle Peter shares is that God, through His divine power, has given His children everything pertaining to life and godliness. Second, Peter declares this power comes through the knowledge of God Himself. The third principle Peter gives is

that God has granted to His children precious and magnificent promises. The fourth truth Peter explains is that the believer has become a partaker of God's divine nature.

Through His divine power, God has given believers everything they need for life and godliness. In explaining the first principle, the basis for the believer's hope, Peter declares, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:2-3). Before addressing the hope this passage offers, it is important to answer a query often made regarding these verses. Many commentators have been perplexed by this passage, wondering who the person is who supplies the divine power that grants believers everything needed. Verse 3 says it is "his divine power," but it is not immediately clear whether the antecedent of this pronoun is God the Son or God the Father. Both are considered options from verse 2. Thomas Schreiner gives a helpful answer to this question, "The ambiguity in the text indicates that Peter did not clearly distinguish between God and Christ. We can conclude from this that God and Christ were venerated equally."¹⁴ This power which is found in the Godhead alone is the power that gives steadfast hope to the believer struggling with sin. The phrase "divine power" is interesting as well as practical. Gene Green explains Peter's use of the term, "The adjective divine occurs only three times in the NT It is the language of his pagan environment, indicating either his own linguistic context or else the background of

¹⁴Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 291.

the people to whom he was trying to communicate.”¹⁵ Peter expresses in language his readers will readily understand, the authoritative message that all they need is found in Christ.

Peter firmly declares the sufficiency of the provision God has given the believer, “He has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). The provision God gives His children includes His presence, His grace, and His providential care. Scripture is also adamant about the power of the Word of God as it restores the soul (Ps 19:7), rejoices the heart (Ps 19:8), regenerates (1 Pet 1:23), preserves life (Ps 119:50), and sanctifies (John 17:17).¹⁶ In addition, Scripture gives ample testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit as He cleanses (Eph 5:26), purifies (Isa 4:4), searches (Zeph 1:12), revives (Ezek 37:17), teaches (John 14:26), imparts the love of God (Rom 5:3-5), and fills with hope (Rom 15:13).¹⁷ God declares that He provides all that the believer needs in order to go through the experiences of life: tests of friendship, the dynamics of marriage, the challenges of child rearing, the struggles of the workplace, the lure of sin, and the pain of losing a loved one.

Furthermore, Peter explains that God has given the believer all he needs to live a life of godliness. Douglas Moo describes godliness saying, “The word is Hellenistic in its flavor and is often translated ‘piety.’ It is a general word, and the biblical authors use it to summarize the behavior expected of Christians who have come to know the God of

¹⁵Gene Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 169.

¹⁶R. A. Torrey, *Torrey’s New Topical Textbook* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897), 238.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 119.

Scripture.”¹⁸ Amidst the struggles of living for Christ, the believer can be lured into believing that he is simply unable to live the life God calls him to live. However, the same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to the believer, enabling him to live a life of godliness in a sinful world.

Peter’s second goal in this passage is to remind his readers that “divine power” is experienced “through the true knowledge of Him who called us.” “Knowledge” is the personal knowledge of God that begins with conversion and continues to grow as the believer walks with Him.¹⁹ Knowledge of Christ is the result of conversion, is real as opposed to imaginary, and is profound, personal, and powerful. Counseling that does not lead to a greater and growing personal knowledge of Christ, regardless of its’ supposed successes, is not biblical, but rather secular in nature.

It is vital to recognize that the One who calls sinners to a personal knowledge of Him does so “by His own glory and excellence.” The knowledge a believer has of God is not one of his own discovery, but one where God reveals Himself. The calling to Christ is on the basis of His goodness and mercy, not on the merit or excellence in fallen man.²⁰ The glory and praise of salvation rests in God, not in man.

Peter’s third premise is to explain that what believers have in Christ is through His “precious and magnificent promises.” Through the new birth, a radical transformation occurs that inherently changes who man is. John MacArthur explains,

¹⁸Douglas Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 41.

¹⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, and Jude*, 292.

²⁰Peter Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 171.

“The term ‘has granted’ is from the same very word (*doreomai*) that occurs in verse 3, again in the perfect tense, describing past action with continuing effects.”²¹ The mighty act of God beginning in conversion continues on in human experience. In the new birth a man becomes a new creation in Christ. He cannot live, nor can he face the struggles of life the same way as he did before, because he is not the same man.

Finally, if the power of God, the knowledge of God, and having promises from God Himself are not enough, Peter reminds his believing readers that they have “become partakers of the divine nature.” Green provides an important insight,

Believers come to share in some essential qualities that are characteristic of God himself. Just what those qualities are Peter does not say here, and it is necessary to search the New Testament carefully to determine what they might be (and, just as importantly, what they might not be!)²²

While the silence of Scripture makes it impossible to identify the specific aspects and application of this divine nature, in the struggles of life, the believer is emboldened, knowing that he has literally come to share in the divine nature of God Himself. Through the new birth, believers share in the very nature of God. McArthur notes, “Partakers (*koinōnos*) is often translated ‘fellowship,’ and means ‘sharer or ‘partner.’ Believers are already partners in the very life that belongs to God.”²³ God’s Spirit makes believers a new creation in Christ. They are no longer who they were before; they have become through the Holy Spirit people who share His nature.

Peter concludes this promise of provision, declaring that the believer has

²¹John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 30.

²²Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 43.

²³MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude*, 31.

“escaped the corruption that in the world through lust.” Though the world did fall into a state of corruption though Adam’s sin, the issue is not God’s creation. In other words, creation is not evil; rather the selfish heart of man is the corrupting influence.²⁴ Moo expounds on this imperative need to deal with corruption,

The Bible makes it clear that our ultimate separation from corruption; will come only with the resurrection of the body. . . . But the reference to ‘evil desire’ at the end of the verse, along with Peter’s focus on godliness in this passage, suggest rather that escaping corruption has to do with the renouncing of sin in this life. . . . I think then that Peter sees our participation in the divine nature as consisting especially in the new ability to resist sin through our union with Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit.²⁵

In these verses, Peter gives both counselor and counselee a biblical standard for dealing with the struggles of life. Well meaning, but erroneous people have sought to convince believers that a biblical knowledge of God is not enough for the difficulties which often characterize modern life. Professionals are sought for wisdom concerning the cause and the cure of what ails the human soul. God denounces this perspective. He pronounces His ability to sustain, embolden, and give power to the believer to overcome every struggle he encounters. God is sufficient. This sufficiency is experienced as a believer lives a life of single-minded faithfulness to Christ, a devotion as sacred as a bride to her groom as Paul portrays in his second letter to the Corinthians.

God Calls Every Christian to an Intimate Relationship with Christ: 2 Corinthians 11:1-3

I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. (2 Cor 11:1-3)

²⁴Schreiner, *1,2 Peter and Jude*, 296.

²⁵Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 44.

One of the endeavors biblical counselors face is to help believers grasp the sacred relationship they have with Christ. Christians often see a counselor, primarily to seek relief from their pain. Many are absorbed with escape rather than their covenant faithfulness to God. Paul addresses this issue of discounting the sacred relationship to Christ in pursuit of personal desires in Second Corinthians. Summarizing this problem in the Corinthian church, MacArthur states, “The danger false teachers pose is that they shift the focus off Jesus Christ and onto rituals, ceremonies, good works, miracles, emotional experiences, psychology, entertainment, political and social causes, and anything else that will distract people.”²⁶ Being lured away from single-minded devotion to Christ is a battle believers must be determined to win. Paul equips the believer for this conflict in two ways. First, he reminds the believer that his relationship with Christ is as that of a bride with her groom and in doing so, emphasizes the need for purity in the relationship. A breach of purity is to break a covenant vow, the most serious offense possible in this holy relationship. Second, to help believers ready for the battle, Paul warns them to recognize the satanic schemes that seek to draw them away from a pure and devoted relationship with Christ.

Paul’s first charge to believers is to remember that their sacred relationship with Christ is similar to that of a bride with her groom. Paul declares, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I may present you as a pure virgin” (2 Cor 11:2). The emphasis here is on purity. Believers are to know that no matter what the trial or temptation, nothing is to draw them away from

²⁶John MacArthur, *2 Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 30.

their single-minded devotion to Christ. The pull to other things or people for heart satisfaction is one every biblical counselor must address. Tim Lane and Paul David

Tripp give the following example:

If I am married to Christ, the core of my present life is not personal happiness, but spiritual purity. Like any other marriage, the big issue is my fidelity. Will I remain faithful to Jesus or will I seek fulfillment elsewhere? Spiritual purity, single-minded devotion, and obedience figure more prominently because of my marriage to Christ. Whether good or difficult things happen to me, my attention must remain riveted to my husband, Jesus.²⁷

The heart of Christianity is centered on the sacrifice of Christ and the debt of love the believer owes to Him. Purity, devotion, and obedience are the appropriate responses to Calvary.

In an effort to stress the importance of purity in their relationship to Christ, Paul explains that he has espoused the believers to Christ as a pure bride. As their spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15), Paul senses a patriarchal responsibility for the Corinthian church. Similar to a father who gives the hand of his daughter in marriage to her husband, so Paul has betrothed the Corinthians to an exclusive relationship with one husband, Christ. Paul's expectation is that believers will maintain a pure, unadulterated relationship with the Savior.²⁸

Biblical counselors must remind their counselees that God is jealous of His bride's misplaced affections. God is wholly committed to His bride and expects her to be faithful to Him. Any attitude, value, or action other than pure and holy devotion is viewed as spiritual adultery. Paul expresses this seriousness, "For I am jealous for you with a

²⁷Tim Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006), 59.

²⁸R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 145.

godly jealousy” (2 Cor 11:2). Paul’s protectiveness is reminiscent of God’s jealousy toward Israel seen in God’s command to Israel in the Decalogue, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the *Lord* your God, am a jealous God” (Exod 20:5). Paul sees that the false teachers in Corinth are not only drawing people away from the purity of the gospel doctrinally, but they are luring them away from the person of Christ. R. V. G. Tasker explains the gravity of this idolatrous teaching, “Whenever the Christian religion ceases to be purely Christ-centered, and no longer draws its inspiration and power solely from Him, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, it is in danger of being corrupted.”²⁹ One of the primary responsibilities of the biblical counselor is to help people realize that no crisis or issue should draw them away from fidelity to Christ.

The second objective of Paul’s discourse is to caution believers to recognize the satanic schemes the enemy employs to draw them away from a pure and devoted relationship to Christ. Paul warns in verse 3, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” As Satan led Eve astray from the contentment of a relationship with God, similarly, he seeks to lead believers away today. The term “led astray” is φθειρω, and signifies, “to destroy by means of corrupting, and so bringing into a worse state.”³⁰ The noun form is φθορα meaning “the effects of the withdrawal of life, and so of the condition of the human body in burial.”³¹ Paul describes an action that does not merely lead astray, but leads to the way of death. Many lives have been ruined by

²⁹Ibid., 146.

³⁰Vines, *Expository Dictionary*, s.v. “corrupt.”

³¹Ibid.

minds “led astray” from Christ to someone or something else. Lane and Tripp note,

What false lovers entice you to forget your true husband and the faithfulness he deserves? Why do we worship other things in place of Christ? Quite simply, we worship what we find attractive. We allow many things to eclipse the beauty of Christ. We devote our hearts to our jobs, other people, a state of mind (comfort, security), success, power, peace, or money. We have many options before us, but we cannot get our identity from these things.³²

Corruption occurs within the believer’s heart when he is divided in his devotion to Christ.

Another responsibility of the biblical counselor is to aid the counselee in seeing the subtle, yet deadly, progression of sin. Humanistic philosophies, described by Paul as “false teachers, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ . . . for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:13,14) teach that there is something more important than living a Christ-centered life. Self-respect, making a name for yourself, and standing for your rights are a few of the misdirected desires that seek to pull a person away from a devoted relationship with Christ. As MacArthur states, “Loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ is nonnegotiable in the Christian life—so much so that Scripture declares, ‘If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed (1 Cor 16:22).’”³³ Ultimately, there is not success or failure; there is simply obedience or disobedience. Counselors must warn those they counsel that life is found in Christ or it is not found at all.

The sacred relationship between the believer and God is primarily a heart issue. Someone committing spiritual adultery, putting his desires before his covenant duty, will not experience God’s best. In fact, this lifestyle may indicate the counselee is not a believer. In Colossians 3, Paul defines who a believer is in Christ and how he is to

³²Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 58.

³³MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, 356.

live. The apostle gives a clear understanding of what it means to be a new creation in Christ and identifies the steps of action necessary for hearts and lives to be transformed.

**God Expects Every Christian to Live a Life of
Active Holiness, Putting Off Sin and
Putting On Christ: Colossians 3:1-14**

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Col 3:1-14)

The goal of biblical counseling is not behavior modification. It is not a mere attempt to stop or start some attitude or action. Biblical counseling seeks to help the believer align his or her heart with the heart of God as it is revealed in Scripture and have behavior flow from this changed heart. Few passages declare this truth more clearly than Colossians 3. In this chapter, Paul exhorts believers to live the reality of their regenerated life in Christ. As of a result of their commitment to Christ, believers have “been raised up with Christ” (3:1). In their present state, believers are “hidden with Christ” (3:3). Subsequently, believers will one day be “revealed with Him in glory”

(3:4).³⁴ Four courses of action govern Colossians 3:1-14 and provide a roadmap to address sin issues in the lives of believers. First, believers are to “set your mind on things above” (Col 3:2). Second, they are to “consider the members of your earthly body as dead” (Col 3:5). Third, believers are to “put aside” (Col 3:8) various types of sins. Finally, they are to “put on” (Col 3:12) godly character qualities.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians is written to address the error of false teaching in the church at Colossae.³⁵ To combat this erroneous teaching, Paul emphasizes the deity of Christ, the believer’s identification with Christ, and the expected outflow of that reality in the believer’s life. The struggle to combat error is a problem every biblical counselor faces. Often, people come to counselors with some religious knowledge and a desire to try to combine biblical teaching, beliefs learned from television personalities, and so called “common sense.” Overcoming this syncretistic approach to life with a viewpoint that is grounded in the Word of God and centered in the glory of God is a challenge the biblical counselor must overcome.

In Colossians 3, Paul emphasizes this need for believers to be firmly rooted in the Word of God. Paul gives numerous commands in these verses, directives that address believers’ attitudes and actions. He instructs the Colossian Christians to “keep seeking” (Col 3:1), “set your mind” (Col 3:2), “consider” (Col 3:5), “put them all aside” (Col 3:8), “do not lie” (Col 3:9), and “put on” (Col 3:12). These commands are based on spiritual conditions. Paul reminds the believers that they “have been raised up with Christ” (Col 3:1), “have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), and “when Christ,

³⁴David Garland, *Colossians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 201.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 23.

who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). In addition, Paul challenges the believers to live a holy life based upon the truth that “you laid aside the old self with its evil practice and have put on the new self” (Col 3:9-10). Finally, he encourages the believers with the reality that they have been “chosen by God” (Col 3:12). For the believer, doctrine always precedes duty. Spiritual responsibility is based upon spiritual reality.

The first course of action Paul instructs the believers at Colossae to follow is to “set your mind on things above” (Col 3:2). Regarding “set your mind” James Dunn remarks, “*Phroneo* means not merely to think but to have a settled way of understanding, to hold to an opinion, to maintain an attitude.”³⁶ Paul issues this command because of their current condition, “for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:2-3). These believers are a new creation. Consequently, their mindset should correspond to their actual spiritual state. Curtis Vaughan writes,

The things that are upon the earth might include material wealth, worldly honor, power, pleasures, and so forth. To make such things the goal of life and the substance for contemplation is unworthy of one who has been raised with Christ and anticipates sharing in His eternal glory.”³⁷

With the new birth, must come new ways of thinking. A believer’s mindset must be in line with his new life.

The second directive Paul gives to the believer is to “consider the members of your earthly body as dead.” The battle against sin is a lifelong struggle. MacArthur

³⁶James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to Colossians and Philemon*, The New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 205.

³⁷Curtis Vaughan *Colossians and Philemon: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 91.

notes, “Sin is like a deposed monarch who no longer reigns, nor has the ability to condemn, but works hard to debilitate and devastate all his former subjects.”³⁸ As a result, the believer must be resolute in his desire to die to his old pattern of living. One aspect of putting to death sin is to grasp the spiritual reality that the believer has died to sin. It is futile and foolish to try to dig up a corpse and bring it back to life. The old man is dead; the believer must allow him to be dead. The unbeliever lives a life dead in sin; the believer is to live a life dead to sin.³⁹ It is the responsibility of the biblical counselor to help counselees understand this doctrinal truth and live their lives accordingly.

How does the believer live a life which is dead to sin? Human beings often try to develop their own systems to do this; however, any attempt short of God’s standard will not succeed. In this passage, Paul communicates what every biblical counselor must convey; humanistic attempts to deal with sin are impotent. Commenting on Paul’s admonition to the Colossians earlier in the letter to not look to human effort alone to overcome sin David Garland notes,

The restrictions listed earlier, “Do not handle? Do not taste? Do not touch?” (2:21), were a futile attempt to protect one’s members from sins’ domination; but such efforts failed to get at the problem’s root, the inner cravings and obsessions. It did not even scratch the surface of the problem. One may putty and paint over termite damage in a house, but unless the termites are eradicated and the damaged boards replaced, the house is doomed to collapse. Paul demands the complete “extermination of the old way of life.”⁴⁰

Biblical counseling seeks to engage people in the lifelong process of mortification, helping them to comprehend that not only do they struggle with other individuals and

³⁸John MacArthur , *Colossians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1998), 132.

³⁹Garland, *Colossians*. 203.

⁴⁰Garland, *Colossians*, 204.

circumstances, but most of all, they struggle with “self.” MacArthur points out, “Covering up sin, internalizing it, exchanging it for another sin, or merely repressing it do not equate to sin’s mortification.”⁴¹ Enabling a counselee to think that all they need is to solve one presenting issue to experience the life God promises is biblically erroneous. Every aspect of life must come under the rule of the Word of God.

The third challenge Paul issues to believers is to “put aside” various types of sin. A. T. Robertson paints a picture of this accomplishment: “It is the figure of discarding these sins like an old worn-out garment that one will no longer wear. Lay them aside for good.”⁴² Biblical counselors must stress to those they counsel that the counselee is responsible for this eradication. God will enable them to put aside these sins, giving them the desire and the power to repent and obey; however, He will not obey for them. One of the duties of the biblical counselor is to exhort counselees to consistently and completely put aside the sins of “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth and do not lie to one another” (Col 3:8-9).

The fourth instruction Paul gives to believers is in verse twelve, to “put on” godly character qualities. This is an all-encompassing action. Paul initially describes this action in verse ten as “have put on.” The use of the present passive participle in verse ten indicates this is a continuing action in the believer’s life.⁴³ What Paul commands is not simply a one-time action. In verse twelve, Paul instructs believers to “put on” a plethora

⁴¹John MacArthur “Mortification of Sin,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 5, no.1 (1994): 43.

⁴²Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Paul and the Intellectual: the Epistle to the Colossians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 102.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 104.

of Christian virtues. Kenneth Wuest comments,

Put on is *endunoe*, “to envelope in, clothe with.” Thayer, commenting on the use of this verb in 3:10 (put on the new man), defines it as follows: “to become so possessed of the mind of Christ as in thought, feeling, and action to resemble Him and, as it were, reproduce the life He lived.”⁴⁴

Biblical counseling recognizes that the purpose of God is not simply to address one particular sin which presents itself, but rather to help a counselee embrace God’s redemptive purpose of a daily pursuit of Christlikeness. This aim is only accomplished as a believer makes the daily choice to actively put on the character qualities Paul puts forth.

In Colossians 3:1-14, Paul describes who a believer is in Christ and gives a list of virtues that are to characterize a Christian’s life such as kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love. He also identifies qualities that have no place in a believer’s life such as anger, wrath, malice, slander, lying, and sexual immorality. In giving these specific commands, Paul paints a picture of the Christian’s heart. A Christian is someone who is raised up with Christ, knows he is one with Christ now, and will one day be revealed with Him in glory. As such, the believer is to put off any remnant of his life before Christ and be fully clothed in Christlikeness. Living out of a heart controlled by one’s identification with Christ is one of the primary goals of biblical counseling. Anything less than this misses God’s grand design for His children and is rebellion against His very purpose in salvation.

Christians are called to live Christlike lives. Scripture demands that believers be vigilant in their eradication of sinful behavior and passionate in their desire to model

⁴⁴Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), in *Logos Bible Software* [CD-ROM] (Bellingham, WA: Libronix Corporation, 1992-2007), Colossians 3:12.

their lives after Christ. The new life is to have no resemblance to the former life. In order for this extermination to occur, self must be removed from the throne of the believer's heart. The only One worthy to occupy the throne of the believer's heart is Christ as Paul demonstrates in his letter to the Philippians.

God Calls Every Christian from a Life of Self-Exaltation to One of Christ-Exaltation: Philippians 2:1-13

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil 2:1-13)

Perhaps the most vivid portrait of the heart of Christ, and therefore, Christianity, is seen in Philippians 2. In this chapter, one sees the pattern of the life of Christ, what He has done in His life, death, burial, and resurrection, and how these truths are a blueprint for His body, the church. Paul first urges the Philippians to recognize that their shared spiritual union with Christ should result in an experienced practical unity among themselves, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind." Second, Paul calls the Philippian believers to live a life of pure motives and actions, "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." Third, Paul challenges them to have Christ's perspective

in living, seeing life as Jesus did, “have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” Fourth, they are to recognize that God is pleased when believers follow the pattern of Christ, “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.” Fifth, Paul charges the believers to energetically work out their salvation, “knowing that God is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.”

The first truth Paul presents to the Philippians is to recognize that the commonalities they share in their spiritual union with Christ should result in an experienced practical union with one another. Paul begins his challenge by stirring the Philippian believers to comprehend the genuine encouragement, love, spiritual fellowship, affection and compassion that are found in Christ. Since these spiritual realities are shared by believers, they are to join together in a common act of worship and devotion to Christ and surrender their ambitious and often selfish desires. MacArthur explains Paul’s intent:

Paul’s concern here is not about doctrines, ideas, or practices that are clearly unbiblical. It is about interpretations, standards, interests, preferences, and the like that are largely matters of personal choice. Such issues should never be allowed to foment controversy within the body of Christ.⁴⁵

Another foundational issue in biblical counseling is helping counselees understand that life does not revolve around them. God calls believers to lay their personal desires and preferences at the foot of the cross, living a life of devotion to the One who died for them.

The second purpose of Paul’s message is to call these believers to live a life of pure motives and actions. In verse 3, Paul instructs, “Do nothing from selfishness or

⁴⁵John MacArthur, *Philippians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 101.

empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.” MacArthur gives the background of the word *επιθια*, translated

“selfishness” in this text:

The term did not originally have a negative connotation and merely referred to a day laborer. But it came to be used metaphorically, and almost exclusively, of a person who persistently seeks personal advantage and gain, regardless of the effect on others. It often was used of the unfair pursuit and self-serving preservation of political office. By New Testament times, it had come to mean unbridled, selfish ambition in any field of endeavor. For obvious reasons, *eritheia* was often associated with personal and party rivalry, quarreling, infighting, and strife It usually carried the idea of building oneself up by tearing someone else down.⁴⁶

MacArthur then connects the relationship of *επιθια* with the word *κενοδοξια*, translated “empty conceit.”

Whereas selfish ambition pursues personal goals, empty conceit seeks personal glory and acclaim. The former pertains to personal accomplishments; the latter to an overinflated self-image. Understandably, a person with such conceit considers himself always to be right and expects others to agree with him. The only unity he seeks or values is centered on himself.⁴⁷

It is this selfishness that is at the core of much biblical counseling. Whether it is a husband and wife who are divided over an issue, children who are rebellious against their parents, or a church staff conflict, self-centeredness and egotism are root issues that must be addressed.

Paul’s third objective in this passage is to challenge the believers to have a new perspective in life, the one that Christ had. Paul exhorts, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). In these verses one sees that theology precedes methodology. Paul does not simply tell the Philippians they should be people who give of themselves because it is right, or is the way to achieve their goal,

⁴⁶Ibid., 110.

⁴⁷Ibid., 112.

rather, he sets forth the example of Christ. Wuest captures the richness of the phrase “let this mind be in you” in describing the mind of Christ and the attitude of the believer:

The words “let mind be” are the translation of one Greek word which means, “to have understanding, to be wise, to direct one’s mind to a thing, to seek or strive for.” The word seems always to keep in view the direction which thought of a practical kind takes. The expression could be translated in a number of ways, each of which while holding to the main idea, yet brings out a slightly different shade of meaning. For instance: “Be constantly thinking this in yourselves;” “Be having this mind in you;” “Reflect in your own minds, the mind of Christ Jesus” (Lightfoot); “Let the same purpose inspire you as was in Christ Jesus” (Way). The sum total of the thought in the exhortation seems to be that of urging the Philippians to emulate in their own lives, the distinctive virtues of the Lord Jesus spoken of in 2:2–4. It is the habitual direction of our Lord’s mind with reference to self that is in the apostle’s thinking, an attitude of humility and self-abnegation for the benefit of others, which should be true also of the Philippians.⁴⁸

Biblical counseling hinges upon believers grasping the truth that one of the imperatives of the Christian life is to think and see life from the perspective of Christ.

In verse 7, Paul describes Jesus’ action as “emptying Himself.” Robertson notes, “Jesus did not consider this state of equality with God, his glory, the hand of the Father, a thing to be held on to at any cost when, by giving up the glory and holding on to the nature of God, he could enter upon his redemptive work for mankind.”⁴⁹ The biblical counselor is to urge believers to surrender their rights and follow in the path of Christ. This is not simply a wise way; it is the only way to know Christ in His fullness. Apart from dying to self, biblical counseling is simply another technique to try and achieve self-centered happiness.

The fourth exhortation Paul gives is for believers to recognize that following the pattern of Christ’s crucified life pleases the Father. Paul reminds the believers that

⁴⁸Wuest, *Word Studies*, Phil 2:5.

⁴⁹Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Paul’s Joy in Christ* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1917), 70.

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). Jesus is the believers’ example; He is the One God the Father is using as the pattern in all His activities with man.⁵⁰ God is pleased with a trusting abandonment to His will. While obedience to the will of God may not always result in the most pleasant experiences and rewards on this earth, knowing that the Sovereign Lord of all is pleased is an anchor one can hold to in the storms of life. God is pleased when man leaves the outcome of obedience in His hands.⁵¹

Finally, Paul charges believers to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and work for *His* good pleasure” (Phil 4:12-13). The command “work out” is a present imperative, an immediate command believers are to continuously carry out. Paul wants the believers in Philippi to recognize that the truths he shares with them are not merely human words; they are the will of God. God is actively at work in their lives. However, they must work out what God is working into their lives. Biblical counseling is not helping someone experience a measure of peace in their heart over an issue; it is assisting those who are sometimes weary to energetically unite with the purpose and plan of God.

⁵⁰See Rom 8:28-29.

⁵¹Peter uses this example of the cross specifically between the submission of employees with employers, citizens with governments, and wives with husbands. Peter proclaims, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, *who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth*; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet 2:21-24).

Conclusion

The essence of biblical counseling is to admonish people lovingly with the truth of Scripture under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. God's people are called to live in meaningful relationships where they speak the truth in love. God's Word addresses the problematic issues that result from sin and disobedience. When believers align their hearts with God's Word, meaningful change occurs. The five passages examined present the teaching of Scripture regarding how God wants the believer to deal with the problems they experience. Moreover, these passages lay a foundation upon which a practical understanding will be constructed to demonstrate the sufficiency of the gospel to address the six specific life issues targeted in this project. In these five New Testament passages one sees that the believer's hope is found in Christ alone; it is accomplished through relationships where individuals kindle Christlike behavior in one another. The simple, yet profound truths in these verses form the scriptural basis for biblical counseling and are the way God desires to bring holiness to His people and glory to Himself.

In addition, it is imperative for the biblical counselor to distinguish between integrationist, and biblical approaches to dealing with the problems of life. Failing to make these distinctions places the biblical counselor in danger of ministering in error. To assist in gaining a scripturally correct understanding, a comparative discussion of these viewpoints is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
AN EXAMINATION OF COUNSELING FROM AN
INTEGRATIONIST AND BIBLICAL
PERSPECTIVE

Counseling is an activity as complex as the individuals who give it or benefit from it. The term counseling holds distinct meanings to different people. For one person, counseling is simply advice given by a trusted friend or family member. For another, counseling is what someone receives when they go to a psychologist or psychiatrist. Another individual understands counseling to be what they receive from their pastor. One's perspective of counseling depends upon one's definition of it.

There are multiple viewpoints regarding the counseling processes.¹ This chapter will present the foundational beliefs of two schools of counseling, integrationist and biblical counseling. These two approaches are the predominate forms of counseling historically utilized at Bellevue Baptist Church. While both perspectives have many elements in common, they have other aspects in which they completely differ.

Integrationist and biblical counseling will be evaluated in three areas: the acknowledgement of God and the sufficiency of His Word, the approach to addressing

¹Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 5-6. Eric Johnson examines five views and gives a response from a spokesperson from the other views: The Levels of Explanation view given by David Myers; the Integration View given by Stanton Jones; The Christian Psychology View given by Robert Roberts and P. J. Watson; The Transformational Psychology View given by John Coe and Todd Hall; and The Biblical Counseling View given by David Powlison.

life issues, and the accomplishment of the counseling concepts. In addition, the specific life issues of marriage, depression, fear, addiction, anger, and forgiveness will be inspected from each viewpoint. The assessment of the integrationist perspective of counseling will commence with an explanation of the approach and an exploration of its history in the evangelical church.

Integrationist Counseling

What is integrationist counseling? Integrationist counseling is an approach that combines the findings of secular psychology with the Bible to develop a counseling structure to help people deal with their life issues. Eric Johnson, a Christian psychologist who practices integration, asserts, “The majority approach among genuine integration models considers integration to be an intellectual project concerned with bringing together and harmonizing the concepts of the theology and philosophy of the Christian faith with those of contemporary psychology.”² Although well-intentioned, this position seeks to integrate psychology with Scripture and in doing so, communicates that the truth of God’s Word is not enough to solve the problems of man.

David Powlison describes those who ascribe to this flawed worldview, “Integrationists attempt to wed secular psychology to conservative Christianity because they believe that Scripture is not comprehensively sufficient.”³ Consequently, Johnson contends that “bringing together and harmonizing” theology and psychology is beneficial. However, God’s Word does not need to be, nor can it be, harmonized with

²Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposed* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 89.

³David Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (1993): 22.

anything else. God's Word stands alone; it is sufficient. Therefore, God condemns any attempt by man to mix secular thought with the truth of His Word: "Thus says the *Lord* of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the *Lord*'" (Jer 23:16). Although faulty, the integrative viewpoint, a prevalent pattern of counseling among many evangelicals, traces its roots back to the early church and maintains a large following in the church today.⁴

In order to understand the shortcomings of integrationist counseling, one must recognize that this position was not the norm of the New Testament church. Paul instructs the church, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thess 5:14). God expects the church to lovingly and wisely counsel its members. One will search the pages of the New Testament in vain for an admonition to take a wayward believer for counsel outside the church. God's stated will is that His Spirit, His Word, and His body are sufficient for the mental, emotional, relational, and behavioral needs of man.⁵

While the early church under the leadership of the apostles held to the sufficiency of Scripture, it was not long before humanistic philosophy infiltrated the teaching of the church. By the second century, heresies such as Gnosticism⁶ arose which

⁴Eric Johnson, *Five Views*, 16-17.

⁵See Acts 2:42-47; Rom 15:4,14; 1 Cor 5:1-6:20; 11:23-34; 2 Cor 4:5-17; Gal 5:1-6:18; Eph 1:14:32; Phil 1:27-2:18; and 2 Pet 1:2-15 for examples of passages that show what God has provided.

⁶"The term 'Gnosticism' is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* (knowledge) because secret knowledge was such a crucial doctrine in Gnosticism The church rejected such teachings as heretical, but many people have continued to find attraction in varieties of these ideas." Harold S. Songer and E. Ray Clendene, In "Gnosticism," in *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

threatened to lead the church away from the “faith once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). Over the next one thousand years, the descent into humanistic thought manifested itself in the church and culminated in a theologically diluted dogma that bred corruption in the church. During this time, the Roman Catholic Church taught about Christ; however, the message it communicated was a mixture of Scripture and logic.

With the onset of the Reformation, *sola scriptura* became the accepted doctrine of the Protestant church. The church reverted back to a pure allegiance to God’s Word. An example of this reform in theological thought can be seen in the way sin was viewed. Martin Luther’s theology regarding sin is summarized by E. Brooks Holifield: “Sin for Luther was incapacity to trust God; it was exhibited most clearly in self-righteousness The serious ‘sin’ with which the pastor dealt with, then, was self-centered faithlessness, not particular transgressions.”⁷ The theology of the Reformation was oriented away from personal fulfillment and refocused toward the glory of God.

The Puritans continued the return to biblical theology.⁸ Ken Sarles observes, “As far as the English Puritans were concerned, every psychological need could be met and every imaginable psychological problem could be solved through a direct application of biblical truth.”⁹ The Puritans saw that the work of ministers was not merely to share

⁷E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 19-20.

⁸Ken Sarles explain the term Puritanism, “English Puritanism emerged in the 1560s. It appeared first as a liturgical reform movement but quickly expanded into a distinct attitude toward the Christian life. The Puritan phenomena could be defined as a movement in the English Church from the mid-sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries that sought for a reformation in the life of the Church and a purification in the life of the individual believer.” Ken Sarles, “The English Puritans: A Historical Paradigm of Biblical Counseling,” in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 27.

⁹Ibid.

the gospel, but to see sanctification become a reality. Wedded to the Word of God, it was unconscionable for the Puritans to consider turning to the musings and imaginations of man to address items such as anger, bitterness, and marriage difficulties. Puritan theologians such as Thomas Brooks, Richard Baxter, and Thomas Watson adamantly pointed people to the Word of God alone as the sole source of truth and comfort.

However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the commitment to biblical counseling among the clergy waned.¹⁰ Secular psychologists began to discuss topics such as anger, depression, and meaning in life, subjects that the church had exclusively dealt with for two millennia. In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud and his disciples influenced society, and in many instances, pastors.¹¹ A growing number of liberal theologians believed that the Bible was useful to guide people to heaven; however, the way individuals should live in the world was best dictated by therapists and psychotherapies. Pastors, swayed by this new belief, began to point their people to psychologists to give them relief from a world of stress. Professionals, not pastors, became the ones who watched over the souls of men.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, much of integrationist practice traces itself to the teaching of Wayne Oates, professor of psychology, religion, and pastoral care from 1947-74 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Russell Moore explains the position Oates held:

The genius of the Wayne Oates' approach to pastoral counseling was its attempt to integrate biblical reflection with the insights of various streams of contemporary psychotherapy. In this model, Oates and his successors sought to be, in the words of

¹⁰David Powlison, "Biblical Counseling in Recent Times," *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 18.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 19.

one of his students, “bilingual” in both pastoral ministry and secular psychotherapy. . . . Oates himself identifies the integrationist stream in the therapeutic ministries of liberal Protestant pastors Harry Emerson Fosdick and Normal Vincent Peale.”¹²

While many at Southern Seminary opposed Oates’ views, the integrationist philosophy took root and soon spread to other Southern Baptist seminaries.¹³

Consequently, in the last half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twentieth-first century, integrationist counseling has become the norm for many evangelical churches. Many Bible colleges and seminaries are unapologetically integrationist in their training of pastors and counselors.¹⁴ Some of the most well-known integrationist writers are Larry Crabb, Henry Cloud, John Townsend, Gary Chapman, Gary Smalley, Frank Minirth, Paul Meier and Emerson Eggerichs. Integrationists are believers in Jesus who do not hold to the sufficiency of Scripture to address the needs of man. Those pastors, professors, and authors who embrace the integrationist position repeatedly refer to Scripture as a basis for answers to the issues of life. Nonetheless, Scripture is not the only basis of truth for the integrationist and is not the sole authority of their message. Integrationists mix Scripture with secular thought in a way that dilutes the power and the purity of the message and promotes an approach to counseling that does not champion the sufficiency of Scripture and the glory of God as the end goal. Instead,

¹²Russell D. Moore, *Counseling and the Authority of Christ: A New Vision for Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Seminary, n.d.), 2.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴David Powlison notes, “The following are noteworthy institutions that have developed and disseminated integrationist thinking and practices: Fuller Graduate School of Psychology; Rosemead School of Professional Psychology and *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*; CAPS and *The Journal of Christianity and Psychology*; American Association of Christian Counselors and *The Christian Journal of Psychology and Counseling*; integrationist departments at seminaries and Christian colleges such as Wheaton College, Dallas Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Liberty University; Minirth-Meier Clinics; Rapha; and ‘Focus on the Family.’” David Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (1993): 24.

this approach leaves in its wake a counselee trying to find life in a place other than God Himself.¹⁵

The Acknowledgement of God and the Sufficiency of His Word

While integrationists value Scripture and quote it often in their writings, those who postulate this approach are not reliant solely upon Scripture. Heath Lambert describes the bankruptcy of integrationist thought,

Because of wrong emphases on the importance and value of secular psychology, misunderstandings regarding the sufficiency of Scripture, confusion regarding what constitutes general and special revelations, and the apparent inability of integrationists to integrate, the movement cannot be regarded as theologically viable.¹⁶

Similar to Uzzah who “reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset” (2 Sam 6:6), some integrationists attempt to lend God a helping hand by teaching principles in addition to those found in God’s Word.¹⁷ Self-esteem, self-respect, and needs-driven motivation are examples of some of the teachings that have woven their way into the accepted dogma of the church, even though they are not found in God’s Word. Powlison explains,

The stated intent of frank integrationists is to borrow theories and practices from secular psychology and to weave these in with Christian faith. Covert or unwitting integrationists do not state this intention but simply borrow. The net effect in every integrationist’s system is that secular error eats up biblical truth, so that false views

¹⁵See Jer 2:12-13.

¹⁶Heath Lambert, “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 2.

¹⁷Theologians unanimously agree that Uzzah’s motives were pure. He was seeking to see God’s glory upheld by preventing the ark from falling. However, even an act conducted with totally pure motives is condemned if the action is contrary to the Word of God. Integrationists may sincerely desire to be more effective ministers, but if they minister in a way that contradicts the pattern of God’s Word, their actions too are denounced by God.

of human nature, of Christ and of the change/counseling process control the system.¹⁸

The Word of God declares this approach to be ridden with both error and arrogance. Solomon wisely writes, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov 14:12). Instead of following God’s revelation in Scripture, integrationists have turned to their own reasoning to deal with painful life issues.

The Approach to Addressing Life Issues

Integrationists believe that both biblical and psychological insights are key ingredients for life change. One of the axioms often quoted by integrationists is “All truth is God’s truth.” In contrast to this belief Rich Thompson notes, “Scripture says, however, that man can easily deceive himself and should not trust his own assessments. He needs truth *revealed* from the only One who knows all truth in order to be sure man’s truth is actually true.”¹⁹ An integrationist will argue that just as one accepts the words of an unbelieving plumber or surgeon as believable and true, it is equally correct to receive advice from an unbelieving counselor concerning the solutions to life’s dilemmas. Thompson explains, “The fallacy here is that plumbing, surgery, and autos are *physical things*, not issues of man’s inner being. God’s Word tells the believer not to rely upon the wisdom of man to meet the inner problems of life.”²⁰ Another argument espoused by integrationists is that believers should follow the example of the Israelites as they left

¹⁸Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” 25.

¹⁹Rich Thompson, *The Heart of Man and Mental Disorders* (Alief, TX: Biblical Counseling Ministries, Inc., 2004), xviii.

²⁰*Ibid.*, xix.

Egypt and “spoil the Egyptians.”²¹ This viewpoint advocates that similar to the children of Israel taking gold and silver from the Egyptians as they left Egypt, the believer should take the best the world has to offer and use it to his or her advantage. However, the spoils the Israelites took from Egypt were tangible, physical riches, not their philosophy of life.²² For the believer to rely upon the world’s wisdom is tantamount to Israel relying upon Egypt, something God condemns:

‘Woe to the rebellious children,’ declares the LORD, ‘who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation . . . Everyone will be ashamed because of a people who cannot profit them, *Who are* not for help or profit, but for shame and also for reproach’ (Is: 30:1-5).

In the same way God is displeased when the children of Israel look to Egypt, where they had escaped from the slavery, so God is not pleased with Christians looking to the world from which they have escaped to provide answers that God alone gives.

Three examples from one of the most popular books written from an integrationist perspective, *Boundaries*, will reveal the error of this flawed counseling approach. The authors, Henry Cloud and John Townsend write, “Many clinical psychological symptoms, such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, addictions, impulsive disorders, guilt problems, shame issues, panic disorders, and marital and relational struggles, find their root in conflicts with boundaries.”²³ The authors mention nothing about sin, grace, disobedience, or God’s Word. From their

²¹See Exod 3:22, (AV).

²²Thompson, *Heart of Man*, xix.

²³Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 28.

perspective, “clinical psychological symptoms” have usurped the authority of the Bible. According to Cloud and Townsend, man no longer chooses to obey or disobey God; instead, he is suffering from psychological symptoms.

In a second example of their errant teaching Cloud and Townsend assert, “That we should be obedient to God, who tells us to set and maintain boundaries, is certainly the best reason. But sometimes we need a more compelling reason than obedience.”²⁴ The message of the Bible is that God is God and is worthy of our worship and obedience. Obedience is the crux of life in Christ. It is the proof of faith. It is the demonstration of love for God and trust in Him. The call of the gospel is to come to the cross, die to self, and live to God. To do so, one must be committed to a life of obedience. For Cloud and Townsend to propose that people need a more compelling reason than obedience to live a godly life demonstrates their shallow grasp of the work of the cross.

Perhaps one of the most glaring examples of the error of integrationist counseling is seen in the third example, Cloud and Townsend’s attempt to address sexual sin, “Sexual problems for men have emerged as a major issue. Such problems include compulsive masturbation, compulsive heterosexual or homosexual relationships, pornography, prostitution, exhibitionism, voyeurism, child molestation, incest and rape.”²⁵ These behaviors are not problems; they are vile sins. The presence of these sins in a person’s life gives evidence that the person is not born again. In addition, problem is not the word that needs to be used for homosexuality, pornography, rape, incest, or any of the other sexual sins listed. What God calls sin is sin and it is not to be watered down and termed a sickness, an addiction, or a problem.

²⁴Ibid., 245.

²⁵Ibid., 221.

As is evidenced in Cloud and Townsend's writings, one of the greatest culpabilities of the integrationist approach to counseling is treating sinful attitudes and actions as a sickness or a problem rather than a sin against a holy God. An erroneous diagnosis of something inevitably leads to an invalid remedy. This compound error is evident in the examination of the accomplishment of integrationist counseling.

The Accomplishment of the Counseling Concept

Undoubtedly, the concepts utilized in integrationist counseling have been credited with accomplishing some positive results; otherwise, this approach to counseling would not have a following. However, an essential question must be answered regarding the integrationist method of counseling. Does it accomplish the will of God? On the night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed to His Father, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). As exemplified by Christ's model, man's purpose in life is to glorify God by doing His will. Any less worthy goal, regardless of the applause of man, falls short of God's standard.

The measuring rod by which the believer is to evaluate his life is the Word of God. Likewise, the Christian counselor must measure his or her accomplishment by adherence to Scripture, not by book sales, the praise of man, or the popularity of the method. The failure to embrace a singular commitment to God's Word exposes the error of integrationist counseling. To choose human reasoning over God's living Word has catastrophic consequences.

A disastrous episode of compromise from the life of King Saul illustrates this sin. In 1 Samuel 15 Saul is commanded by God, "Go and strike Amalek and utterly

destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam 15:3). However, Saul does not carry out the command of the Lord; instead, he chooses his own reasoning over obedience to God. “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed” (1 Sam 15:10). Rather than carry out the spoken will of God to destroy all of the spoils from the battle, Saul makes his own determination and spares the best. Samuel rebukes Saul for this arrogance:

Has the *Lord* as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the *Lord*? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the *Lord*, He has also rejected you from being king. (1 Sam 15:22-23)

Similarly, when a counselor relies upon his own wisdom, he rejects the Word of God in favor of his own reasoning. While integrationist counselors may have good intentions, God is not evaluating their sincerity; single minded obedience to the Word of God is God’s mandate.

In contrast to the contention that Christians should assimilate the best techniques of the world into their counseling practice, Powlison points out the audacity of a process that seeks to change lives apart from a total dependence upon God, “From God’s point of view, even foolish attempts to assert a God-less ‘scientific’ or ‘medical’ objectively register as overtly religious acts. To attempt to explain and cure the souls of

others while saying in your heart, ‘There is no God,’ is damnably religious.”²⁶ God takes offense at being rejected by His creation for someone or something else.

The antithesis of the integrationist position is the biblical counseling approach which begins and ends with God and is guided solely by His Word. The examination of biblical counseling will identify the core beliefs of the concept and then trace the history of the viewpoint in the church. Subsequently, the acknowledgement of God and the sufficiency of His Word, the approach to addressing life issues, and the accomplishment of the biblical counseling position will be explored.

Biblical Counseling

Contrary to the integrationist counseling position, biblical counseling addresses the issues of life strictly from a biblical point of view. A comprehensive description of the core beliefs of biblical counseling is found in the confessional statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition:

Biblical counseling occurs whenever and wherever God's people engage in conversations that are anchored in Scripture, centered on Christ and the Gospel, grounded in sound theology, dependent upon the Holy Spirit and prayer, directed toward sanctification, rooted in the life of the church, founded in love, attentive to heart issues, comprehensive in understanding, thorough in care, practical and relevant, and oriented toward outreach.²⁷

The essence of biblical counseling is scriptural in its entirety: the foundation, structure, goals, means, and ends. Scripture provides the basis for biblical counseling and instructs believers with the concepts needed to see transforming change occur in the lives of those

²⁶David Powlison, “Affirmations and Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 1 (2000): 22.

²⁷The Confessional Statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition,” [on-line]; accessed 4 July 2011; available from <http://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/about/confessional-statement>; Internet.

they counsel.²⁸

The pattern for biblical counseling is modeled throughout the pages of Scripture. In Genesis 3, God demonstrates the way to address the issues of sin and suffering in His discourse with Adam and Eve.²⁹ In this passage, their transgression of the Law of God has fractured their relationship with God and each other. Along with their broken relationships, Adam and Eve are left dealing with the issues of guilt, despair, and sinful ways of coping. God addresses their sin, calls them to repentance, pronounces the consequences of their sin, and confronts their sinful mindset of covering up rather than confessing and repenting. Finally, God speaks words of forgiveness and redemption to restore them to a relationship with Himself and declares what their relationship with each other should be.

In the following chapter of Genesis, God is again witnessed counseling His people. Cain has anger in his heart towards his brother Abel. God questions Cain about his condition and then warns him about what will come if he does not repent, “Then the *Lord* said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it’” (Gen 4:7-8). Cain arrogantly questions the sovereignty of God and resists accountability for his sin. However, God does not turn from Cain, but confronts his sin. As God approaches Adam, Eve, and Cain, He models a biblical counseling paradigm that is focused on sin, repentance, and a transforming relationship with God.

²⁸Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), ix.

²⁹See Gen 3:1-24.

The scriptural blueprint for dealing with sin does not stop in Genesis.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God calls mankind to repentance, warning them of the results of sin and rebellion.³⁰ Continuously, God addresses the issues of trusting and obeying Him from the heart. Throughout the pages of Scripture, God never speaks of low self-esteem, a lack of self-respect, past trauma, or mental illness as excuses to remain in sin.³¹

The unwavering biblical pattern of confronting the sins and sufferings of man with the Word of God is also exemplified throughout the pages of the New Testament.³² For example, in The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus devotes a large portion of His message to correct the flawed thinking and living of the Jewish people.³³ Repeatedly, Jesus provides a correct understanding of what God's Word says in juxtaposition to the cultural, compromised interpretation the religious leaders of the day promoted. In so doing, Jesus challenges Israel to live a life that is true to the spirit of the Word of God, not just the letter.

Paul follows in Christ's steps of standing upon the Word of God and emphasizes the need to do so to the early church. He describes the goal of his apostolic

³⁰Exod 10:3; 15:26; Deut 30:15; 19; 2 Chr 6:27, 37; 7:14; 12:7; 2 Kgs 17:13; Isa 30:26; 55:7; Jer 5:25; Ezek 18:32; Hos 10:12; Zech 1:4; Mal 4:2 are a few Old Testament examples of God's call for confession, repentance, and the promise of restoration.

³¹Jay Adams, "Apart from organically generated difficulties, the 'mentally ill' are really people with unsolved personal problems." Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 29.

³²The emphasis in this paper is to contrast the integrationist and the biblical perspective, with the integrative position often bringing in secular reasoning. It is not to seek to point people to a book, even the Bible, instead of the Person of Christ. Paul David Tripp points out, "We must not offer people a system of redemption, a set of insights and principles. We offer people a Redeemer." Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2002), 8.

³³Six times in one chapter Jesus says words such as "You have heard that it was said." Jesus replies, "But I say unto you" (Matt 5:21-48).

ministry to the Colossians, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col 1:27, 28). Later in the same letter Paul identifies with the Word of God Jesus proclaims, “Let the word of Christ dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to God” (Col 3:16). Paul asserts that the Word of God is the core component needed to admonish people to maturity in Christ.

Historically, the early church was resolute in its commitment to bring believers to maturity through the Word of God. However, as previously discussed in the history of the integrationist viewpoint, biblical counseling essentially disappeared from the church in the centuries between the early church and the Reformation. While the truth of biblical counseling was present in the Word of God, that truth along with many of the other cardinal doctrines such as *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* was not proclaimed because of the humanistic and aberrant theology condoned by the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, with the reemergence of a commitment to biblical theology during the Reformation, a return to biblical counseling manifested. The reappearance of an emphasis on biblical counseling is evidenced in the writing of Puritans such as Thomas Watson, Richard Baxter, and others who wrote extensively on issues such as repentance, true godliness, and pastoral care.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, biblical counseling encountered a new challenge. Society and much of the church was heavily influenced by the rise of secular psychology through the writings of Wilhelm Wundt, William James, and

Sigmund Freud. John Street notes,

Pastors, trained under these psychologies, influenced an entire generation of parishioners to think and act according to the therapeutic instead of according to the gospel. Even the authorial intent of Scripture was replaced by a psychological hermeneutic that loaded biblical terminology with psychotherapeutic meaning. Where the Bible was not replaced by a psychology, it was redefined by it.³⁴

During this time, the church was engaged in several significant internal and external struggles.³⁵ As a result, a decline in ministerial commitment to biblical counseling began to surface as the norm.

However, with the onset of the 1970's, biblical counseling once again entered the domain of the church and its influence has continued into the twenty-first century.

Powlison describes this shift:

In 1970 Jay Adams, a Presbyterian minister, launched an anti-psychiatry movement among American, conservative Protestants. Partly inspired by O. H. Mowrer and Thomas Szasz, Adams made a three-fold claim. First, modern psychological theories were bad theology, misinterpreting functional problems in living. Second, psychotherapeutic professions were a false pastorate, interlopers on tasks that properly belonged to pastors. Third, the Bible, as interpreted by Reformed Protestants, taught pastors the matters necessary to counsel competently.³⁶

Adams fathered the movement that was initially called nouthetic counseling³⁷ and has recently been referred to as biblical counseling. In the decades that followed, Adams' work has expanded and others have joined the ranks. David Powlison, Ed Welch, Paul David Tripp, Wayne Mack, Michael Emlet, and Tim Lane are some of the men who are

³⁴John Street, "Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 32.

³⁵Lambert summarizes the forces with which biblical counseling struggled. He includes revivalism, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the psychological revolution, a changing American economy, the Civil War, and World Wars I and II. Lambert, *Theological Development*, 12-20.

³⁶David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of the Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1996).

³⁷Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 41-52.

being used by God to shape the theological dynamics of biblical counseling.³⁸ Those in the biblical counseling movement maintain a strict adherence to Scripture as the sole source to address the problems of life and assert that God’s Word is sufficient for every need.

The Acknowledgement of God and the Sufficiency of His Word

Biblical counseling is built upon the sufficiency of Scripture; the only authority in biblical counseling is the Word of God. Extra-biblical insights are valued when they line up with the Word of God; however, they are only an auxiliary resource and are not authoritative on their own.³⁹ Biblical counselors agree with the words of the prophet Jeremiah, ““The prophet who has a dream may relate *his* dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have *in common* with grain?’ declares the *Lord*” (Jer 23:28). The words of men are not to be compared to the Word of God for power, wisdom, or application.

While the Word of God is the guide in biblical counseling, the glory of God is the goal. Scripture clearly commands the believer, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Living every area of life for the glory of God is the aim of the believer. Consequently, in receiving and giving biblical counsel, the objective is not merely helping people experience relief from

³⁸The two noteworthy discussions of the history of biblical counseling are David Powlison’s “Competent to Counsel? The History of the Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement” and Heath Lambert’s “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988.”

³⁹Counselees may be encouraged to read a book such as A. W. Tozer’s *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961) or Stuart Scott’s *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002) to understand a truth the counselor desires them to comprehend. While these are valuable books, they do not compare to the sole authority of the Word of God.

discomfort, but leading them to know and experience lives that bring glory to God. An example of this liberating truth is seen in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. As the apostle shares the trials he is experiencing, he describes his life as one of being "afflicted, crushed, persecuted, and struck down" (2 Cor 4:8-9) and "constantly being delivered over to death" (2 Cor 4:11). Yet, Paul writes these words as one who "does not lose heart" (2 Cor 4:1). Paul is able to have this mentality because he is committed to the glory of God rather than his own personal pleasure,

For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. (2 Cor 4:15-17)

The Christian life is centered in the glory of God. For a Christian counselor to ignore or allow God's purpose to be circumvented by humanistic philosophy opposes the clear will of God. Biblical counseling has as its goal the glory of God. Anything less than this pollutes God's purpose and makes man's glory the end.

The position of biblical counseling regarding the sufficiency of Scripture is that the Word of God is the source of truth which adequately addresses the problems faced by man. To add anything to the Word of God yields a defrauding and confusing approach. Stuart Scott comments on man's confusion about truthfully knowing himself and his dependency on Scripture to guide him:

This confusion comes from man's own desire to elevate and justify himself, which is certainly fanned by the twisted humanistic influences that have taken over our society. We must establish from the outset that the source of truth about man is not sociology (the study of our society), psychology (the humanistic study of the soul), or secular anthropology (the evolutionary study of man), but the Word of God.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Scott, *Exemplary Husband*, 30.

Renouncing any form of secular humanism, biblical counselors adopt an uncompromised platform that is centered on the glory of God and guided by the sufficiency of Scripture as they counsel believers regarding the issues of life.

The Approach to Addressing Life Issues

Because biblical counselors are focused on the supremacy of God and His Word, they do not ignore the specific issues of life with which God's children wrestle. While certain secular terms such as anorexia, bulimia, or bipolar disorder are not used in the Bible, the heart issues behind such labels are clearly identified. The Bible points out that man is responsible for every thought (2 Cor 10:5), word (Matt 12:36), motive (1 Cor 4:5), and deed (Rev 22:12). With the matter of personal accountability being settled, the issue is not how does the biblical counselor assist a counselee to experience comfort in life, but how does a biblical counselor help a person walk in obedience to God's Word. If an individual cannot stop doing drugs because he has an addiction, if a person cannot keep from having an affair because they do not love their spouse any longer, then counseling is merely helping people know how to cope with the pain of life. However, if Paul's declaration, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:19) is understood to be the Word of God, then it is imperative that sinful issues are faced.

The world, and often the church, is filled with people who have adopted a mindset that gives more credence to psychological terms than scriptural truths. Often people view alcoholism as a disease instead of disobedience to the Scripture, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). Others may label someone as manic rather than someone who does not obey the

command, “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Co-dependent, low self-esteem, and dysfunctional are other terms that are often used to mask the realities of sin and disobedience to God. The Bible never commands someone to live a certain way because of a self-esteem issue; self-esteem is never mentioned in Scripture. The Bible instructs believers to obey God and conform to His will. Powlison describes the categories suggested by psychological organizations as “an eclectic potpourri imbibed from godless sources: Alcoholics Anonymous, the recovery movement, psychodynamic psychology and humanistic psychology.”⁴¹ Biblical counseling approaches man with the understanding that he was created for the glory of God, fell in the Garden of Eden, and has experienced redemption through the person of Christ. The issues people face are not psychological symptoms, but rather spiritual choices to obey or disobey. It is only through the lens of Scripture that life and the choices pertaining to it come into focus and counselors and counselees are able to accomplish God’s will.

The Accomplishment of the Counseling Concept

As the examination of biblical counseling concludes, one question remains, what does biblical counseling accomplish? There are various ways to answer this question. One could ask for statistics concerning the improvement of those engaged in biblical counseling or one could look for testimonies from those whose lives have been changed as a result of involvement in counseling that is solely grounded in Scripture. However, only one valuation ultimately matters, faithfulness to God.

⁴¹Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” 33.

When Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians he shares his perspective of ministry with them:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.*" Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know God*, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor 1:17-21)

Paul's commitment is to preach the Word of God. His message is not designed to be clever, but to be filled with Christ. Although some would consider his words foolishness, those who respond to the grace of God would understand the teaching as the "power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Further in the same letter Paul adds, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (1 Cor 4:1-2). The standard by which Paul measures the accomplishment of his ministry is faithfulness to the message God has entrusted to Him.

The paramount issue regarding biblical counseling is being faithful to Scripture. Does biblical counseling have God and His glory as the chief end? Is it guided by the Word of God alone, avoiding the human reasoning and cleverness Paul denounced? Is it dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit? Does it condemn sin and promote holiness? The answer to all of these questions is yes. As a result, biblical counseling achieves what God wants it to accomplish. In doing so, the biblical counseling method maintains a commitment to be faithful to Scripture while at the same time addressing specific life issues.

Specific Life Issues

Integrationist and biblical counselors both seek to help people struggling with life issues. However, the two schools of counseling approach these struggles from two vastly different perspectives. In order to demonstrate the differences, examples will be given from both the integrationist and biblical counseling viewpoints.⁴² The illustrations for the two approaches of counseling will cover the six specific life issues of marriage, depression, fear, addiction, anger, and forgiveness selected for this project.

Marriage

One of the most common reasons individuals seek counseling pertains to marital problems. Similar to their perspective regarding other life issues, integrationists and biblical counselors are diverse in their approach to resolving issues among married couples. For example, in one of the most popular books on marriage, *The Five Love Languages*, written by integrationist Gary Chapman, the author's premise is that each person has their own personal love language. As a result, the author contends that individuals have a love tank that can only be filled with messages spoken in their love language. Chapman asserts,

Could it be that deep inside hurting couples exists an invisible "emotional love tank" with its gauge on empty? Could the misbehavior, withdrawal, harsh words, and critical spirit occur because of that empty tank? If we could find a way to fill it, could the marriage be reborn? Could that tank be the key that makes marriage work?⁴³

⁴²Four of the six integrationist examples are from either Frank Minirth or Paul Meier. While there are numerous integrationist authors and proponents, Minirth and Meier, former professors at Dallas Theological Seminary and founders of the Minirth-Meier Clinics, have been some of the most proficient and unambiguous integrationist writers.

⁴³Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992), 23.

In this illustration of the integrationist position, Chapman builds a doctrine on mere whims and suggestions. There is no scriptural evidence that even suggests something such as a love tank exists; however, Chapman validates this demanding spirit as a worthy entity. Instead of focusing on the example of Jesus who came to “give and serve” (Mark 10:45) Chapman gives credence to those who expect their spouse to meet their needs.

Powlison explains the error behind Chapman’s hypothesis:

The core premises of *5LL [Five Love Languages]* are simply false. They pander to the very problem that most needs solving That basic misunderstanding has systematic misleading effects. Fallenness brings not only ignorance about how best to love others; it brings a perverse unwillingness and inability to love. It ingrains the perception that our lusts are in fact needs, empty places inside where others have disappointed us. The empty emotional tank construct is congenial to our fallen instincts, not transformative.⁴⁴

Powlison points out that the basic principles of *The Five Love Languages* do not meet the biblical standard for truth. He also observes that while there are some snippets of veracity in the book, Chapman does not take into account the fallen nature of man or the transforming power of the cross.

In contrast to the integrationist perspective espoused by Chapman, Paul Tripp expresses the dynamics of a healthy marriage from the biblical counseling viewpoint:

We all face the same thing. Our marriages live in the middle of a world that does not function as God intended. Somehow, someway, your marriage is touched every day by the brokenness of our world But there is one thing for sure: you will not escape the environment in which God has chosen you to live. It is not an accident that you are conducting your marriage in this broken world. It is not an accident that you have to deal with the things you do. None of this is fate, chance, or luck. It is all a part of God’s redemptive plan. Acts 17 says that he determines the exact place where you live and the exact length of your life. He knows where you live, and he is not surprised at what you are facing. Even though you face things that make no sense to you, there is meaning and purpose to everything you face. I am

⁴⁴David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003), 229-30.

persuaded that understanding your fallen world and God's purpose for keeping you in it is foundational to building a marriage of unity, understanding, and love.⁴⁵

Tripp acknowledges that a biblical marriage finds its center in an abiding relationship with God. God is the One who rules in the nuances of where people live, how long they live, and what happens to them day by day. The events that transpire, whether vocational, financial, or relational are in the hands of a sovereign God. It is only as couples grasp this truth that they have a foundation upon which to build a marriage, based upon the redemptive hand of God.

Depression

A second issue that often brings believers to a counselor is the plaguing matter of depression. Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, two Christian psychologists who champion the integrationist position, summarize the following thoughts about depression faced by middle aged men,

Men also become depressed in middle life and may express this through improper sexual conduct. As though to prove to themselves that they are not losing their youth, they often are attracted to a younger female. This is the result of severe insecurity—they deceive themselves into believing that they are not losing their youth. Thus, the depression of middle life may be expressed by sexual misbehavior.⁴⁶

The errors of the integrationist position are glaring in this example. The writers speak of sexual conduct, presumably outside of marriage, referring to it as improper rather than denouncing it as sinful. Minirth and Meier seemingly know the motives of people, something only God can truly know. They claim that middle aged men are seeking to

⁴⁵Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 21.

⁴⁶Frank B. Minirth and Paul D. Meier, *Happiness Is a Choice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 116.

“prove something to themselves” and “severe insecurity,” something Scripture never even addresses, is spoken of as though it is a functional part of a person. Making an assertion that is outside the parameters of biblical authority, the authors sanction feelings of depression as a controlling determinate of life.

In juxtaposition to the integrationist movement, Ed Welch adopts a position divergent from that of Minirth and Meier:

If you are struggling with depression, you face spiritual problems every day. You must find a way to deal with them, or they will overwhelm you . . . In depression, the new way of living is to believe and act on what God says rather than feel what God says. It is living by faith. To paraphrase Hebrews 11:1, “Faith is being certain of what we do not feel.” In other words, when there is a debate between what your feelings say and what Scripture says, Scripture wins. Any other result and you are essentially telling God that he cannot be trusted.⁴⁷

Welch boldly refers to spiritual dynamics in his discussion of depression. While admitting that people can have strong feelings, he directs them to find peace and resolution in their relationship with God. Welch, citing specific Scripture references, instructs the person struggling with depression to live by faith instead of feelings. He challenges the person experiencing feelings of depression to obey God, rather than continuing to wallow in disobedience.

Fear

Fear, the third life issue to be examined from the two differing counseling positions, is a paralyzing sin that at times keeps people from seeking the spiritual help they need. Committed to the integrationist stance, Minirth and Meier, give the following guidance regarding fear to someone whose mother-in-law is dealing with agoraphobia.

⁴⁷Edward T. Welch, *Depression: The Way Up When You Are Down* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2000), 3-5.

Your mother-in-law might have an obsessive-compulsive personality. Many of the people treated for agoraphobia and other severe anxiety disorders are the oldest child of their sex in their families and have a propensity toward certain obsessive-compulsive behavior, better known as perfectionism. She was probably the victim of verbal abuse and conditional acceptance as a child. She must have suffered some severe emotional pains in her life because she is so afraid to lose control or to socialize. Pray that God will give her the courage to get professional help for this serious problem. She may require four to six weeks of intensive hospital therapy. Show her compassion and focus on her good traits. Clearly, perfectionists have some positive traits, such as being hard-working, conscientious, and dedicated. But counterbalancing these pluses are some hard-to-tolerate minuses, not the least of which is a need to manipulate people and circumstances.”⁴⁸

Minirth and Meier diagnose the woman with a condition, obsessive-compulsive personality, a label which dislocates fear from its moral context in Scripture into a secular, atheistic context. By doing so, they authenticate the symptom of a self-focused life as an acceptable spiritual condition. In addition, they label two other sins, agoraphobia and anxiety disorder, as normal. Finally, Minirth and Meier seem to say that it takes an extended period of time for a person to confess sin, repent of it, and subsequently experience the joy and peace that comes from a heart full of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to Scripture, they call the self-centered sin of manipulation a minus rather than a transgression that must be confessed and forsaken.

Representative of those who are aligned with the biblical counseling position, Paul Tripp applies scriptural principles in his discussion of the relationship between the fear of God and fearing other things or people.

Fear of the Lord means that I carry around with me such a deep awareness, awe, and reverence for the power, holiness, wisdom, and grace of God that I would not think of doing anything other than living for his glory. Fearing the Lord means that this worshipful awe is the single and unchallenged motivator of everything I think, desire, say, and do The kingdom of self is driven by all kinds of other fears: fear of man, fear of discomfort or difficulty, fear of failure, fear of not getting my

⁴⁸Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, *Ask the Doctors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 129.

own way, ect. The principle here is that if God doesn't own the fear of our hearts, he will not own our lives. You and I are always living to avoid what we dread. If we dread displeasing God more than anything else, because our hearts have been captured by a deep, worshipful and loving awe of him, we will live in new ways.⁴⁹

Tripp correctly sees fear, not as a disease or something that is outside man's control, but as a part of life God designs. Man is made to fear God. As that fear motivates a person to walk in a right relationship with God, even though his world may be turned upside down, the person will have peace in their heart because they are abiding in an intimate relationship with their Lord. Man will either live in the fear of God or the fear of man.

Addiction

The number of addictive behaviors which can manifest in the lives of individuals are too many to count. While alcohol and drugs have been a familiar area of addiction, the list has grown to include addictions to food, sex, gambling, the internet, and shopping. In the fourth area of life issues explored, integrationists Minirth and Meier give several reasons for compulsive eating in their book, *Love Hunger: Recovery from Food Addiction*. While these explanations are particular to food consumption, the principles apply to their understandings of other addictions. The authors give their opinion as to why people are addicted to food:

Overeaters may respond compulsively to cultural pressures. Overeaters may subconsciously desire added pounds to protect themselves from love and intimacy. Overeaters may use food to satisfy their need for immediate gratification. Overeaters may use food as a tranquilizer. Overeaters may concentrate on their desire for food to avoid facing their problems. Overeaters may eat to punish themselves or others. Overeaters may eat to relieve depression or stress. Overeaters may have a faulty perception of their body image. Overeaters may have emotional

⁴⁹Paul David Tripp, *A Quest for More* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007), 126-27.

feelings about food, which were developed at their parents' dinner table. Overeaters use food as a nurturer to satisfy their love hunger.⁵⁰

One of Minirth and Meier's greatest failings is that they do not address the issues of sin and rebellion against God in their reasons of why people may overeat. Instead, they limit their discussion to surface areas rather than the heart issues. Another point of error is that they do not explain that satisfaction apart from a deep and intimate relationship with God is not possible.

In contradistinction to the integrationist perspective, Welch explains the difference between the sin and the disease model of addictions:

Why all the fuss about the disease model? Perhaps it seems that I am splitting hairs and overreacting to the mislabeling of heavy drinking and other forms of enslavement. But these labels have a profound effect on our corporate opinion. Theology really does make a difference. Words such as alcoholism, treatment, symptoms, disease, therapy, and even addiction itself communicate that the ultimate cause is in our body rather than in our heart. There is a dramatic difference between seeing drunkenness as a victimizing physical weakness verses expression of a self-focused heart. A physical weakness is not changed, only tolerated and controlled. A self-centered, idolatrous heart can be transformed by sanctifying grace through the Holy Spirit and can receive spiritual resources to fight a winning battle.⁵¹

Welch asserts that a believer struggling with addiction does not have a condition, but a choice. His use of the term enslavement implies that addiction is rooted in sin. He points out the vital nature of labels, knowing that whether one sees addictions as a disease over which they have no control or as an expression of a sinful, self-centered heart determines if the addictive behavior will be addressed from a biblical perspective.

⁵⁰Frank Minirth et al., *Love Hunger: Recovery from Food Addiction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 28.

⁵¹Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2001), 32-33.

Anger

The fifth issue to be inspected from the both the integrationist and the biblical counseling positions is anger, a potentially explosive and damaging emotion. Writing from an integrationist position, Les Carter, seeks to explain the dynamics of anger:

Anger itself is not an indication of a self-image problem. In fact, a person with a healthy self-image will recognize that there are times when it is appropriate and responsible to be assertively angry The person who is excessively angry is saying, ‘Notice my needs!’ (which is fine). . . . Anger is the emotion most closely connected one’s sense of self-preservation. God has given each individual an inner desire to be taken care of and to be treated properly. So it is normal when an individual responds to the emotional urge to stand up for himself.⁵²

Once again, an integrationist writer uses several non-scriptural terms such as self-respect and self-image, without any biblical justification. In addition, Carter builds a doctrinal framework upon this unsubstantiated word. The combination of anger with ignored needs is categorized as an acceptable reaction. Giving no biblical reference, God is declared to have given man the right to assert himself in anger.

In an obvious departure from the integrationist perspective, Powlison gives the biblical counseling position on anger:

Anger is natural to human beings in two very different ways. It is natural because we were created in God’s image with the capacity for godly anger. But sinful anger is also natural to us since the Fall. As human beings corrupted into the image of Satan, we are also hard-wired for resentment and hatred. And in a fallen world, human anger is so disordered that even righteously aroused anger easily degenerates into something sinful.⁵³

Powlison begins the discussion of anger discussing creation, the Fall, and Satan. He distinguishes between godly and sinful anger, denoting a depraved nature in man. While

⁵²Les Carter, *Mind Over Emotions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 20-21.

⁵³David Powlison, *Anger: Escaping the Maze* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2000), 1-2.

he notes the capacity for godly anger, he also warns of the destructive potential in anger, showing how it can evolve from anger to resentment and then to hatred. Powlison not only describes the fallen nature of individuals, but also speaks of the fallen world in which men dwell. Lastly, he records how anger is something Christians should seek to avoid.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness, the final life issue considered from the two counseling positions is often accompanied by significant emotional turmoil. Those who have who experienced physical or sexual abuse as children can be in great pain when they enter a counselor's office. Others who have been wronged by a mate, a child, a friend, or an employer have substantial issues to confront. Integrationists Paul Meier and Robert Wise make the following observation about forgiveness:

Forgiveness is a reason for new self-esteem. Our self-worth rises as we practice releasing the grudges and hurts we have been carrying with us. We are actually recovering a power over ourselves that is a reason for personal worth. Anyone who has struggled to find release from hurt knows how difficult this path can be and that it takes a strong person to walk it.⁵⁴

In their discussion on forgiveness Meier and Wise designate self-esteem, a subject not found in Scripture, as a motivation to forgive. In addition, self-worth, another term not addressed in the Word of God becomes a reason for obedience to God. The authors promote personal strength, with no mention of reliance upon God, as a motivation for walking in forgiveness, thus fostering pride, rather than worship and humility.

⁵⁴Paul Meier and Robert L. Wise, *Crazy Makers* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 226.

From the contrasting biblical counseling position, Adams describes the imperative of forgiveness:

Forgiveness toward a brother does not depend upon the goodness of that brother, but rather it rests upon the mercy and kindness of the Christian who forgives. Because Christ gave himself for them, forgiving them in kindness and grace, Christians must forgive their brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way. No Christian has the right to withhold forgiveness from his brother when he seeks it in repentance (Matthew 18:22).⁵⁵

Adams correctly views forgiveness as a spiritual issue instead of a moral dilemma.

Forgiveness is centered in Christ and His work accomplished on the cross. Adams focuses people on Christ and His cross. Personal struggles should not be a distracting issue where forgiveness is concerned; Christ alone is the catalyst for forgiveness.

Biblical counselors and integrationists each want to help struggling persons, but there are glaring differences which place the perspectives in opposition with each other. While both viewpoints utilize Scripture, only biblical counseling is solely guided by it. The integrationist counseling perspective adds humanistic thought to Scripture, thereby changing the direction from a position of reliance upon God's Word to a mixed bag of counseling processes. No longer is the glory of God and the redemption of man, the sole purpose of the method. Additionally, integrationist counseling often makes light of rebellion against God, referring to it as something other than sin. On the other hand, biblical counseling aligns with Scripture in calling sinful behavior sin and holds to a commitment to see believers live Christlike lives.

Summary

In conclusion, Lambert captures the essence of the counseling approach that

⁵⁵Adams, *Competent*, 231.

brings glory to God, “Counseling is fundamentally a theological task. Whether or not practitioners and recipients are aware of it, the activity of counseling is always and in every way done with-respect-to-God.”⁵⁶ While integrationist counseling does employ Scripture, it often fails to establish strong theological moorings. Not following God’s will is sometimes seen as a sin and other times termed as a condition or a sickness. However, the Bible teaches that sin is rebellion against God and brings the judgment of God. Without this theological framework, counseling becomes a discussion revolving around personal fulfillment, not spiritual holiness.

Perhaps the most serious error in integrationist counseling is the failure to build upon the foundation of God’s Word with the framework of God’s Word. The consequences of this error are pictured near the end of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus speaks about the difference between the wise and the foolish man. The wise man builds his house on the rock of God’s Word, yielding a firm structure. The foolish man seeks to build, however his foundation is shallow and the consequences are disastrous. Herein is the simple synopsis of the two diverse counseling perspectives: the wise method, aptly termed biblical counseling, is built solely upon God’s Word, while the integrationist position, combines God’s Word with the shifting sand of human logic, falling short of an uncompromised reliance on biblical truth.

⁵⁶Lambert, “Theological Development,” 1, citing David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 35-50.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

One of the challenges faced by Bellevue Baptist Church is the need to train Life Group leaders to counsel members of their Life Group from a biblical perspective. Previously, when Life Group leaders have encountered Christians who are struggling with life issues such as fear, discouragement, marital problems, or addictions, the tendency has been to refer those believers to the Biblical Counseling Ministry of the church. The senior pastor as well as the leadership of the church has recognized the need to develop leaders who are aware that they are competent to counsel those who have attitudes and actions that do not line up with God's Word. Consequently, this project was designed to increase awareness among Life Group leaders of the scriptural command to be engaged in biblical counseling, to help them grow in their confidence to counsel, to equip them to address the core issues of biblical counseling and to develop a curriculum to train Life Group leaders to counsel from a biblical viewpoint.

This chapter is a description of the methodology used to conduct this project. The scope and implementation of the project are discussed in detail. The participant selection process, the pre-training instrumentation, the post-training evaluation, schedule of the training, and the curriculum are stated and explained. Upon completion of the project, an evaluation of the participants was conducted to determine the efficacy of the training and materials. A final analysis of the training program will be conducted to

determine any needed modifications.

Crucial to the success of the project was the requirement that the participants have a leadership role in their Life Group. First, Life Group leaders at Bellevue have already been determined to possess the spiritual maturity needed to apply biblical principles to their own lives as well as the lives of others. Second, the leadership role held by the participants provided them with a credible platform from which to minister and a group of believers who potentially needed biblical counseling.

Participant Selection and Pre-Screening Process

The process to identify and select the participants for the biblical counseling training program began in August 2011. An initial meeting was held with the educational staff at Bellevue Baptist Church to explain the nature of the project and to enlist their assistance in the candidate selection process. An introductory presentation was then made at the quarterly meeting for Life Group leaders to assemble a pool of potential participants. Once a prospective list of Life Group leaders was developed, a video presentation detailing the facets of the training program was sent by email to the candidates. Two weeks before the training program began, a letter of invitation was mailed to thirty-three possible participants, the response yielding the group of twenty-seven individuals who committed to the project.

One week prior to the beginning of the first class, a pre-training questionnaire was distributed to the participants to measure their confidence and competence regarding biblical counseling in two specific areas (see the appendix). First, the questionnaire sought to determine the involvement of the Life Group leaders with other believers who have spiritual struggles, their readiness to counsel others, and their confidence to provide

biblical counseling. Second, the questionnaire evaluated the participants in the six specific areas selected for the study: marriage, discouragement, fear, addiction, anger, and forgiveness. In particular, the pre-training questionnaire evaluated the participants in four areas. First, the instrument measured their level of competency to address a particular life issue. Second, the questionnaire assessed their knowledge of both the heart of the problem and the steps needed to address the issue from a biblical perspective. Third, the participants' knowledge of the specific biblical principles to apply in a counseling situation was identified. Fourth, their understanding of the truth that total obedience is the life required by God was determined.

The Training Curriculum

The training module of the project, *Becoming an Instrument of Change*, was conducted with the selected participants over an eleven week period. The first five sessions laid the foundation for biblical counseling. The last six sessions dealt with six specific counseling situations often encountered in biblical counseling. The training sessions began on September 7, 2011.

Session 1 – September 7, 2011. The first training session, “You are a Dynamic Instrument of Change,” covered three components. First, an introduction and overview of the project was presented to the participants. A notebook with a curriculum schedule and the notes for the initial session was given to each class member. In addition, each class member received a copy of *Counseling and the Authority of Christ*.¹ The key verse for this session was “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that

¹Russell D. Moore, *Counseling and the Authority of Christ: A New Vision for Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Seminary, n.d.).

you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another” (Rom 15:14). During the introduction, the calling of mature believers to bring others to maturity in Christ was explained.

The second topic addressed two areas which demonstrate the connection between discipleship and counseling. First, this correlation is seen as the goal of ministry for believers is expressed in the New Testament. Jesus explained the purpose of the believer’s ministry in some of the most familiar words of the New Testament, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20). Discipleship is the emphasis of the Great Commission and the calling of the church. Throughout the Gospels and Acts, the word disciple and its derivatives are used 270 times; however, there is no mention of the word disciple after the book of Acts.² In the Epistles, the words equipping, teaching, warning, urging, admonishing, or counseling replace the previous use of disciple and any variations of the word. For example, Paul issues this challenge to the believers at Colossae, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col 1:28-29) While the words used in the Gospels and the Epistles are different, their meanings are parallel. Disciple, counsel, and admonish share the synonymous goal of bringing people to maturity in Christ. The second associative link between discipleship and counseling is

²James Strong, *Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong Number and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary in PC Study Bible* [CD-ROM] (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1998-2008).

seen in the function of the Word of God. In John 8:31, the Word of God in relationship to discipleship is communicated; in Colossians 3:16, the responsibility of the Word of God to teach and admonish is addressed. In both passages, the definitive purpose of Scripture is the maturation of the believer.

The five characteristics which define a biblical counselor based upon Romans 15:14 were the final discussion points in this training session. First, biblical counselors are common, ordinary believers exemplified by Paul's usage of the phrase "my brethren." Second, they are spiritually mature or "filled with goodness." Third, biblical counselors are "filled with knowledge" and controlled by God's Word. Fourth, they are spiritually "able." Fifth, they are committed to God's purpose "to admonish one another." While admonishing describes the dynamic of the believers in the early church, it is the pattern given for the mature believer today.

Session 2 – September 14, 2011. The second session, "You Have All You Need to be an Instrument of Change," challenged participants to see that as believers, they possess all they need in Christ to be used by Him to see lives transformed into His image. Peter's admonition in 2 Peter 2:2-4 was the key verse for this session:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

As evidenced in Matthew 26:31-35, Peter knew firsthand the impact that biblical counsel can have on the believer.

Two areas of focus were addressed during this session. First, a thorough explanation of what believers have in Christ was given. As Peter expressed in 2 Peter

1:2-4, God gives the believer everything needed through His divine power, experienced in an intimate relationship with Himself. The first provision God gives to the believer is life through His presence, His grace, and His providential care. The second essential imparted to the believer is godliness. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to the believer, enabling him to live a life of godliness in a sinful world. The third element granted to the believer is a personal knowledge of God through His Word. The essence of biblical counseling is grasping the truth that God's Word is sufficient for every need.

The second section of this session was titled "The Truth of the Box." Participants were given a diagram of a box. They were instructed that all of the issues discussed in biblical counseling such as anger, forgiveness, depression, lust, relationships, jobs, and church were in the box. God speaks to every area in the box. As Abraham Kuyper has aptly stated, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry out, 'Mine!'"³ The issues in the box are the matters in which we have control or responsibility. However, there is an interesting tension in the responsibility. For example, while I have no control *over* my marriage, I have total control *in* my marriage. I am totally responsible before God for whether I obey Him in my marriage. Believers have four distinct responsibilities before God. First, they are responsible for every thought (2 Cor 10:5). Second, believers are responsible for every word (Matt 12:36-37). Third, they are responsible for every deed (2 Cor 5:10). Fourth, believers are responsible for every motive (1 Cor 4:5). The session was concluded with a reminder that God is

³Abraham Kuyper, "Not a Square Inch" [on-line]; accessed 31 May 2011; available from <http://kuypersociety.blogspot.com/2006/02/not-square-inch>; Internet.

sufficient for every struggle the believer encounters. This sufficiency is experienced as the believer lives a life of single-minded faithfulness to Christ.

Session 3 – September 21, 2011. This session, “You Have a Sacred Relationship,” centered on the consecrated relationship the believer is to have with God. The key verses for this week were Paul’s words to the believers at Corinth, For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:2-3). One of the challenges faced by biblical counselors is helping people understand what is truly important. In an age where personal happiness is the message that people are bombarded with daily, shifting their thoughts from self to the imperative of the Lordship of Christ is an issue which must be settled before any secondary matter can be confronted.

First, the necessity of fidelity to God was explained using Paul’s illustration of the marriage relationship in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3. In marriage, faithfulness takes precedence to personal desires. Where there is a choice between devotion to the marriage vows and happiness, commitment to marriage precedes personal gratification. Similarly, devotion to Christ must take priority over personal pleasure.

Second, to further substantiate this truth, Jeremiah’s words from Jeremiah 2:13 were examined. Emphasizing the futility of devotion to anything or anyone other than God, Jeremiah writes, “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13). Spiritual adultery is committed when the believer places

something or someone besides Christ on the throne of his heart. The biblical counselor is charged with the task of leading people to understand that the foundational issue is not their spouse, discouragement, or anger, but rather faithfulness to God is the sole pursuit which will yield true fulfillment.

Since the theological groundwork for biblical counseling had been laid for the participants in the first three meetings, the necessity of assigning homework to counselees was detailed at the conclusion of this session. Homework in the form of journaling or scripture memory is an effective tool between counseling sessions. These assignments assist the counselee to understand and apply the truth of God's Word. The memorization of 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 is an example for a homework assignment to be given after the first counseling session.

Session 4 – September 28, 2011. The responsibilities for a biblical counselor as set forth in Colossians 3:1-14 were addressed the fourth session, "You Have Specific Responsibilities." The goal of biblical counseling seeks to help the believer align his or her heart with the heart of God as it is revealed in Scripture. Few passages declare this truth clearer than Colossians 3:1-14. Two specific areas discussed in these verses formed the teaching outline for this lesson.

The first point in this training session, The Believer's Condition, focused on who the believer is in Christ. For the believer, his condition in Christ has two positional truths. First, he has been raised up. Paul clearly explains this position in Colossians 3:1, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." The believer being raised in Christ is pictured almost every week at Bellevue Baptist Church in the ordinance of baptism. Using this

familiar image, the biblical counselor can explain to the counselee that he or she cannot live as they once did before they came to know Christ; they are now a new creation and God expects them to live according to mandates He puts forth in Scripture. The new way of living adopted by the believer must be centered in Christ. Any lesser motivation is merely behavior modification, a faulty, and often legalistic, attempt to start or stop an action.

The second positional truth seen in Colossians 3 is that the believer has died. Paul writes in Colossians 3:3, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Simply said: the old person is dead, let it stay dead! The reality of what it means to be dead in Christ must repeatedly be placed before the counselee to help him have a proper view of his identification with Christ. The believer must realize that he cannot continue to dig up the old decaying dead self and expect to live a new life in Christ. Not only is the believer dead in Christ, he is also hidden with Christ in God. This unseen, but actual, spiritual reality is an anchor of hope for the believer as he awaits Christ’s return.

In addition to The Believer’s Condition, the second fundamental discussed in this session was The Believer’s Commands. Paul puts forth two imperatives in Colossians 3 which give explicit direction to the child of God for daily living. First, the believer must think correctly. Paul gives an exhortation to believers in Colossians 3:2, “Set your mind on things above.” Internalizing the Word of God is an essential practice that produces a transformation in the mind, heart, and life of the believer. God commands the believer to immerse himself in the Scripture in order to think rightly.

The second imperative found in Colossians 3 is to live rightly. Living rightly, the believer aligning his heart with the heart of God has two requirements. First, the

child of God is to put off sin. Paul states in Colossians 3:7, “But now you also, put them all aside; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.” Sin is to be put aside. “Put aside” is a middle rather than a passive voice verb. Consequently, it is important for the counselee to grasp the truth that God will enable him to put aside sin, but He will not do it for him. The second required action for the believer to live rightly is to put on godly virtue as expressed in Colossians 3:12, “So, as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” Paul initially describes this action in Colossians 3:10 as “have put on.” By commanding the same action here, he shows how this is to be a continuing action in a believer’s life. Once again, “put on” is a middle, not a passive voice verb requiring action on the part of the child of God. The Christian is as godly as he chooses to be.

Session 5 – October 5, 2011. The final session designed to lay the foundation for biblical counseling, “You Have Jesus as a Pattern,” was based upon Paul’s portrait of the heart of Christ in Philippians 2:1-13. In these verses, the pattern of the life of Christ and the way His life is a blueprint for His body, the church, is presented. During this teaching session, six expectations God has for His children patterned after the model set forth by Christ were explored.

First, God expects unity from His children. Paul emphasizes this truth in Philippians 2:2, “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” Paul makes it clear that the commonalities believers share in their spiritual union with Christ should yield a practical union with one another. A foundational issue in biblical counseling is helping counselees

realize that life does not revolve around them. God calls believers to lay their personal desires and preferences at the foot of the cross and to choose unity with other Christians as the proper response to Christ's sacrifice for them.

The second expectation God has for the believer rooted in Christ's example is humility. Paul writes in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." One of the predominant roots of sin the biblical counselor must confront is selfishness. Whether it is a husband and wife who are divided over an issue, children who are rebellious against their parents, or a church-staff conflict, self-centeredness is an issue that must be addressed.

Third, God expects clarity from His children as evidenced in Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul does not tell the Philippians they should be people who give of themselves because it is right, or because it is the way to achieve their personal goals. Rather, he sets forth the example of Christ as a demonstration of the selfless viewpoint the believer should embrace. Effective biblical counseling hinges upon believers grasping the truth that they must see life clearly from the perspective of Christ, modeling the attitude He exhibited.

The fourth expectation God holds for believers is simplicity. Paul gives an explanation of this expectation in Philippians 2:5-8.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The biblical counselor is to urge believers to surrender their rights, die to their selfish desires, and follow after the pattern of Christ. It must be communicated that this simple path is the only way to know Christ in His fullness. Apart from dying to self, biblical counseling is merely another technique to try to achieve self-centered happiness.

Fifth, God expects fidelity as Paul explains in Philippians 2:9-11:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *every knee will bow*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul reminds the Philippians that the faithful pattern of Jesus' crucified life pleases the Father. God expects the believer to demonstrate a loyal and trusting abandonment to His will. While obedience to the will of God may not always result in the most pleasant experiences and rewards on this earth, knowing that the Sovereign Lord of all is pleased is an anchor one can grasp in the storms of life.

The sixth quality God expects His child to embrace is tenacity. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure." The command "work out" is a present imperative emphasizing an immediate and continuous command believers are to obey. The truths Paul shares in Philippians 3 are not mere human thoughts and opinions; they are the Word of God and the will of God. Similarly, the principles a biblical counselor shares with a counselee are not merely opinions or suggestions, but truth from God's Word that is sufficient for every need.

Session 6 – October 12, 2011. Commencing with this training session, six

specific counseling situations often encountered in biblical counseling were addressed. One week was devoted to each topic beginning with this week's discussion on marriage. The key verse for this week's session on marriage was Ephesians 5:33, "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband." The curriculum for this training session was divided into two components, with the first section focused on the practical steps for marriage counseling. Seven specific steps were given to the participants. First, the counselor should make sure the person or persons are saved. A person must have a relationship with Christ before they can be receptive to biblical counseling. Second, questions should be asked to ascertain the condition of the marriage. The counselor should listen as the counselees share the history of their marriage, taking written notes of issues or details that may need to be revisited. Third, the biblical counselor should inquire how the couple has tried to deal with the difficulties in their marriage.

The fourth step given was that counseling should begin where the couple is, addressing the presenting need that motivated them to seek counseling. Fifth, repentance is an imperative. The participants were encouraged to memorize Jeremiah 2:13 and Hebrews 12:1-2 to share with counselees regarding repentance. Sixth, the couple needs to be instructed regarding the need to ask for forgiveness, clearing their conscience with God and one another. Seventh, the fifth step is repeated. Repentance is imperative. Insight is not change. Change is change. As repentance takes place, a change in actions and attitude should be evident. The goal of marriage counseling is to see people be restored to a right relationship with God and their spouse.

The second segment of the training session was devoted to a discussion of five

issues a biblical counselor should be prepared to deal with in marriage counseling. First, the biblical counselor should never promise confidentiality. If someone confesses child pornography or a plan to kill themselves or someone else, the biblical counselor has a legal obligation to turn that information over to the proper authorities (Rom 13:1). Second, if a spouse is being physically abused, the counselor should encourage that person to get to a safe place. Third, a biblical counselor should use great wisdom and caution if they counsel someone of the opposite sex, ensuring that others are present and that the counselee is matched with someone of the same sex as soon as possible. Fourth, the two biblical reasons for divorce, adultery (Matt 19:1-9) and desertion by an unbeliever (I Cor 7:15) were explained. A clear distinction was made between biblical grounds for divorce and sinful actions which should be eradicated, but are not reasons for the dissolution of a marriage. Fifth, the most important issue to communicate in marriage counseling is obedience. Change will not occur based simply upon what a person knows; transformation will only take place as the counselee takes definitive action to align himself with God's truth given in Scripture. A biblical counselor should give homework assignments that will help the person being counseled to walk in daily obedience to God's Word.

Session 7 – October 19, 2011. The seventh session dealt with one of the most common issues presented in the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue Baptist Church, discouragement, or as psychologists would sometimes describe it, being depressed. The key verse for this discussion was “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps 42:11). The training session was divided into three

specific subject areas.

The first topic explored was the use of antidepressant drugs, examining when the use of antidepressants is appropriate and their ultimate inability to treat the root cause. The prominence of antidepressant drug use as a solution for life issues was discussed. Although there may be a place for some antidepressant use, and while believers have the utmost respect for the doctors and psychiatrists who prescribe pharmaceuticals, the final authority on how a believer lives is not a doctor or a psychiatrist, but the Word of God.

Addressing the value of antidepressants Ed Welch writes,

At this point, the most apt analogy for how these medications work is aspirin. It can alleviate symptoms but it doesn't usually treat an underlying cause. In a similar way, antidepressants can help, even though a medical exam will not reveal a 'chemical imbalance.' At this time, there are no blood tests to verify that a chemical deficiency is the cause of depression.⁴

Two observations about discouragement were shared. First, one does not generally treat a medical problem with a spiritual solution, nor should one treat a spiritual problem with a medical solution. Second, for the believer, the brain cannot make a person sin or keep a person from following Jesus in faith and obedience (1 Cor 10:13).

The second topic in this training session was an examination of four reasons for discouragement. First, life on earth cursed by sin is hard (Rom 8:22-23) and can at times be discouraging. Second, some discouragement is the result of suffering. The distinction between *νουφετεω*, admonishing, warning, or teaching and *παπακαλεω*, encouraging or comforting was addressed. Not all biblical counseling confronts sin, some counseling brings comfort in the face of suffering. The third basis for discouragement covered was sin. God's instruction to Cain was pointed out as a key to

⁴Ed Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2004), 210.

understanding sin and discouragement, “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen 4:7). The fourth cause for discouragement shared was not finding life in Christ. Since Christ is our life (Col 3:1-4), discouragement is what believers experience when they are not finding life in Jesus.

Third, the way God wants His children to address discouragement was explored. Discouragement is overcome through repentance from not living a God-centered life (Jer 2:13). Every man-made cistern leaving a person discouraged is the result of not living a life that is centered in God. In addition, believers should face their discouragement as David did, ““Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps 42:11). Finally, the child of God will prevail against the onslaught of discouragement as he is more dedicated to the truth given in God’s Word than the feelings he experiences as he views his situation (Eccl 8:11-12, Deut 29:29).

Session 8 – October 26, 2011. The topic for the eighth week of training was overcoming fear. The key verse for the session was 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (AV). Fear drains and demoralizes the believer and as a result, it is one of the most common issues addressed by biblical counselors. When a believer is assaulted by fear, it impacts the individual spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. For the child of God, fear is the result of not believing in the goodness and sufficiency of God’s grace. However, when the believer is fully dependent on God, “He will never be shaken He will not fear evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is

upheld, he will not fear” (Psalm 112:6-7). Living in an abiding relationship with God brings about a security and safety not experienced by the person who lives in unbelief.

Three principles regarding fear were presented to the participants to help them minister to individuals paralyzed by this crippling emotion. First, fear is thinking which must be controlled. Fear originates in the mind. Often it is the consequence of an undisciplined lifestyle which in itself is sin, allowing unbelieving thoughts to linger in the mind instead of “taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Fear is a mindset of unbelief; it is choosing to not believe what God has revealed about Himself in His Word. Fear is a carnal mind in action. In this bed of disobedience, the flesh takes root and fear begins to grow. A helpful word picture to utilize with a counselee is to view fear as the darkroom of the mind where the negatives of life are developed. In actuality, fear is not the problem. The issue is who or what is feared. Isaiah declared, “And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the *Lord* of hosts whom you should regard as holy and He shall be your fear and He shall be your dread, then He shall become a sanctuary” (Isa 8:12-14). Expounding on the source of fear Oswald Sanders wrote, “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you really fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas, if you do not fear God, you will end up fearing everything else.”⁵

The second principle shared was fear is an emotion which must be overcome. Fear is a powerful, controlling emotion. It pulls, tugs, shouts, and grabs hold of us. God’s Word associates fear with words like dismayed and trembling (Deut 1:21, Josh 8:1). The believer must confront the feelings he experiences with the realization that he

⁵Oswald Chambers, “God-Pleasing Preachers, Part 3” [on-line]; accessed 1 October 2011; available from http://realtruthmatters.com/manuscripts/god_pleasing_preachers; Internet.

is called to walk by faith, not feelings. Submission to God is not only bringing thoughts, but also feelings under the Lordship of Christ. The person who is dominated by his feelings is not dominated by Christ and is living in a self-centered state of rebellion. God asks through Joshua, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the *Lord* your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh 1:9).

The third principle discussed was that fear is conquered through the pursuit of a sanctified life rather than pursuing a satisfying life. Through His Word and His Spirit, God gives the grace to overcome fear, but God will not be used to meet our selfish purposes. God will meet the believer’s needs as he walks in holiness; God will not be used as a means to simply enable someone to be happy. The believer overcomes fear through the promises and presence of God. As one walks with God, he walks in faith, not fear. “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. For the *Lord God* is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (Isa 12:2).

Session 9 – November 2, 2011. During this training session, the biblical approach to overcoming addictions was examined. The central verse given to the participants to share with those enslaved by addictions was Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” While the word addiction is not a biblical term, rightly understood, it is a biblical picture. In Romans 6:16 the Bible speaks of being a slave to someone or something. While Scripture knows nothing of a believer who cannot control some aspect of behavior, it does address someone who has so given himself to sin that he the slave of sin. Three specific enslavements or addictions are pointed out in Scripture: (1) Proverbs 5:21-23 speaks of addiction to sex; (2) Proverbs 23:20-21 refers to an addiction to food; and (3) Proverbs 23:29-35 describes the person

who is addicted to alcohol. Solomon's examples of enslavement are not exhaustive. In modern society, slavery can include addictions such as video games, recreation, shopping, viewing cable news, and social web sites.

To lay the foundation for a biblical perspective regarding addictions, the question of whether or not addictions are a disease was addressed. A disease is a diagnosable condition with a physical cause. Although an addiction may involve the brain, it is not a disease of the brain. There is a difference between being influenced by genetics or chemicals in the brain and being controlled by them. Welch gives a biblical definition of addiction, "Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God."⁶ First, addiction is not a disease; it is a disorder in worship. Addiction demandingly says, "I must have (fill in the blank) to be satisfied." The issue is not what goes in the blank; the issue is that something filling the blank has taken the place of God in an individual's life. Jeremiah 2:13 illustrates the plight of the person who pursues fulfillment in life outside of a relationship with God. Second, addiction is not a disease; addiction is self-worship. A person bound by an addiction arrogantly declares, "I want what pleases me!" Sadly, we live in a society that reduces things from sin to disease to normal as evidenced by Welch, "A Gallup poll found that a great majority of Americans are convinced that alcoholism is indeed an illness rather than a sign of moral backsliding. In fact, they have the support of the American Medical Association, which twenty-one

⁶Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, N J: P and R Publishing, 2001), 35.

years ago formally declared alcoholism a disease.”⁷

At the conclusion of the session, three steps to overcoming addiction were shared. The first step is identification. The believer struggling with addiction must be reminded who he is in Christ. The biblical counselor can share verses such as 1 Corinthians 6:1-3 and 15-20 to remind the counselee of their spiritual genetic make-up. The second requirement to overcome an addiction is discipline. A specific discipline that will assist the believer to conquer an addiction is fasting. In Ezra 8:21, Ezra declares, “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.” While the aim of fasting is Godward and spiritual, appealing to Him for grace, nevertheless this discipline is related to the truth Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.⁸ As the believer, by grace, makes his body his slave rather than being a slave to his body, the believer aligns himself with the will of God and is in a place to experience liberation. The third step in freedom from addiction is devotion. The believer must realize that his life is about God, not his own self. Isaiah 55:1-2 drives home the need of whole-hearted devotion to God and the barrenness of attachment to all lesser things.

Session 10 – November 9, 2011. The tenth training session for Life Group leaders focused on training biblical counselors to respond to those they encounter who confess they are angry. The key verse for this session centered on James’s declaration,

⁷Ed Welch, “Sin or Sickness? Biblical Counseling and the Medical Model,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 10, no. 2 (1990): 30.

⁸“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. *This* you know, my beloved brethren. 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. (Jas 1:18-20)

The study began with an examination of anger. God's anger was explored, with an emphasis on the truth that anger is an appropriate response to sin because it would be impossible for a moral being to stand in the presence of evil and be unmoved. The righteous anger of God was contrasted with the hatred of Satan who "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:9). While God's character is inundated with compassion, Satan's nature is marked by rage.

During the ensuing discussion, two lies regarding anger were exposed. First, the lie that anger is something that resides within a person was debunked. Second, the false belief that someone has an excuse to get angry because he or she needs to get something out of their system or off their chest was uncovered. Unrighteous anger was laid bare as a self-centered expression of a person who is not getting what they demand.

To build a biblical foundation on the subject of anger, several verses were presented to the participants including Psalm 34:8; Proverbs 14:29; Proverbs 19:19; Proverbs 22:24-25; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Galatians 5:19-21; James 1:18-20. Where does anger come from? First, anger comes from the heart of man as revealed in Matthew 15:17-19. Second, James 4:1-5 explains that anger also results from the selfish desires of man. In essence, anger is the consequential behavior which occurs when a believer ceases to view God as his life source and forgets his God ordained purpose in life.

To conclude the session, Ephesians 4:26-32 was given as the scriptural guide that speaks to anger. Three useful steps regarding anger from this passage were discussed. First, the believer should not get angry, rather he should deal with issues

before they escalate (v. 26). Second, a child of God should not speak garbage words, but instead should use words that build up another person (v. 29). Third, a believer should not hold a grudge, but should embrace forgiveness, realizing that he has been forgiven much by Christ (v. 32) Unrighteous anger has no place in the heart of a believer and should be eradicated from his life through confession and repentance.

Session 11—November 16, 2011. The subject for the curriculum for the final session was forgiveness and centered on Paul’s words, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). A definition of forgiveness, the tension between forgiveness and reconciliation, the experience of forgiveness, and a practical understanding of forgiveness were covered.

First, Timothy Lane defines forgiveness as “an act of compassion forgiveness cancels a debt.”⁹ To forgive is to give up the right for revenge or payment from the other person. It is treating someone as if they have not sinned. This perspective is only possible for someone who has given their life to Christ and is living for His pleasure, not their own.

Second, the steps to dealing with sin and experiencing forgiveness were examined. Sinful people and their offences must be confronted. While Christians are commanded to forgive, they are first expected to confront (Matt 18:15-20; Luke 17:3-4). When confrontation and repentance occur, forgiveness will be the outcome. However, if the offending party does not repent and ask to be forgiven, reconciliation cannot take place. When this scenario transpires, the party who has been sinned against is

⁹Timothy S. Lane, *Forgiving Others* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2004), 6.

commanded to forgive, but turns the offending person over to God for His justice to take place. Paul teaches the principle of trusting the justice of God when he charges the believers in Rome, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom 12:17-19). Jesus also speaks to situations when reconciliation is not possible as He explains the way to address a sinning brother in Matthew 18. If the sinning brother does not respond when first confronted by one person or in the subsequent meeting in the presence of two or three Christians Jesus commands, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church: and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt 18:17). While there is no room for anger or bitterness in the relationship, there is clearly a lack of reconciliation.

Third, the experience of forgiveness was considered. Forgiveness is both an event and a process. Although granting forgiveness is a one-time occurrence, walking in the fullness of forgiveness can be a progression requiring time. The three ways a believer should respond to someone who asks for forgiveness are (1) I will not bring it up again or use it against you; (2) I will not bring it up to others in gossip, or malign you because of it; (3) I will not bring it up to myself or dwell on this offense.¹⁰ The excuse of I can forgive, but not forget was eradicated. God declares, “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer 31:34). Likewise, when a person chooses to forgive, God gives the grace for them to remember the sin no more.

¹⁰Ibid., 7.

Third, the imperative of submitting to the will of God regarding forgiveness was explained. A believer will mature and benefit as they see God's purpose for their own lives in the offences they encounter. Martha Kilpatrick notes, "Forgiveness is accepting God's sovereign use of people and situations to strip you of self-importance and self-love."¹¹ In contrast, when a believer fails to follow in the steps of Christ, God's judgment will fall upon that person (Matt 18:23-35; 2 Cor 2:10-11).

At the conclusion of the eleventh training session, a post-questionnaire (see appendix 2), identical to the pre-class questionnaire, was administered to the participants to measure the effectiveness of the training module.

Conclusion

In response to the need to train Life Group leaders at Bellevue Baptist Church to counsel members of their Life Group from a biblical perspective, the curriculum, *Becoming an Instrument of Change*, was developed and taught in the fall of 2011. In this inaugural session, twenty-seven Life Group leaders were trained to counsel believers who are struggling with life issues such as fear, discouragement, marital problems, addictions, anger, and forgiveness. Prior to this training, the inclination among the lay leadership was to refer those believers to the Biblical Counseling Ministry of the church. Subsequent to this training module, it is hopeful that the participants realize that they are "competent to counsel" and that they have an increased awareness of the scriptural command to be engaged in biblical counseling. In addition, it is hopeful that the participants grew in their level of confidence to counsel and are better equipped to

¹¹Martha Kilpatrick, "Forgiveness Quotes" [on-line]; accessed 10 October 2011; available from <http://tentmaker.org/quotes/forgivenessquotes.htm>; Internet.

address the core issues of biblical counseling with members of their Life Group. This project has been a worthwhile endeavor and the overall desire is to see Life Group leaders take an active role in counseling their group members as a result of this training session and future sessions which will utilize this curriculum at Bellevue Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Personal and spiritual problems are experienced by believers as well as unbelievers. During 2011, I counseled over 450 individuals, many of them believers, who were dealing with a wide variety of problems such as marital conflicts, homosexuality, addictions, discouragement, lust, and anxiety. The three other full-time biblical counselors at Bellevue Baptist Church saw a similar number of people. Many other individuals with comparable struggles never made an appointment with one of the ministers in biblical counseling, although they sat in a Life Group class every Sunday.

At Bellevue Baptist Church, the Life Group leadership has an opportunity to minister to these struggling individuals on a weekly basis. The inclination, however, has been to refer those believers to the Biblical Counseling Ministry. Because Colossians 1:28-29 clearly states that mature believers have a scriptural responsibility to bring other believers to maturity in Christ, the pastor and the leadership at Bellevue Baptist Church desire to equip Life Group leaders to address problems faced by believers from a biblical perspective. This project was undertaken to develop a curriculum to train Life Group leaders to counsel from a biblical viewpoint and to help them grow in their confidence to address the core issues of biblical counseling with their group members. The evaluations and observations of that effort are the focus of this chapter.

Evaluation of Project Purpose

This project was recommended by the pastor, the educational staff, and the Biblical Counseling Ministry of Bellevue Baptist Church. There has been an increasing awareness that for Bellevue to function in a New Testament manner, Life Group leaders must be trained to counsel. The training of leadership was necessary not only to care for the increasing numbers of new believers who are joining Bellevue, but also to minister to the city as a whole through the Bellevue Loves Memphis ministry emphasis. Most significantly, the purpose of the training was to fulfill the biblical mandate to counsel one another (Rom 15:14; Col 1:28-29; 1 Thess 4:14).

The project was intended to train leaders in Life Groups at Bellevue to have a theological foundation for biblical counseling and a practical understanding of how to minister to people in six areas that are routinely presented to the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue. The purpose of the project was completed as 27 participants were equipped to provide biblical counseling through Life Groups at Bellevue Baptist Church.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal was to increase awareness in Life Group leaders of the command to be engaged in biblical counseling. This goal was undertaken through an examination of one of the primary scriptural statements concerning biblical counseling, Paul's charge to the believers at Rome, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). The participants in the project were already engaged in ministering to the members of their Life Groups. Identical pre and post-training surveys utilizing a 5-point Likert scale were administered to the participants to

determine the efficacy of the project. According to the pre-seminar questionnaire, 85 percent of those surveyed were aware of God's command to counsel other Christians prior to the training. Subsequent to the implementation of the project, 89 percent of the participants indicated an awareness of the scriptural mandate to counsel other Christians. Although the majority of the Life Group leaders were previously conscious of the biblical command to counsel other Christians, the post survey revealed a slight increase in those who were aware of the command.

The second goal was to see Life Group leaders grow in their confidence to counsel. The project was designed to assist Life Group leaders to be more assured in their abilities to give biblical counsel through an understanding of five doctrinal principles: the biblical mandate for believers to bring others to maturity in Christ, the comprehension that believers possess all they need in Christ to see lives transformed into Christlikeness, the realization that a believer is to live in unadulterated relationship to God, the understanding of the biblical responsibilities for a biblical counselor, and the recognition that the life of Christ is the model for the body of Christ. The data from the pre-survey questionnaire indicated that 27 percent of the Life Group leaders felt competent to counsel someone struggling with the six life issues addressed in the training curriculum. At the completion of the project, 73percent specified that they felt proficient to counsel someone struggling with the six life issues covered in the project, a significant increase. This improvement indicates the attainment of the goal for the participants to increase in their confidence to counsel from a biblical prospective.

The third goal of the project was to equip Life Group leaders to address the core issues of biblical counseling, engendering in these leaders a vision of counseling that

deals with the entire person. This objective was met through the two-fold design of the curriculum. First, a doctrinal foundation was laid to establish the scriptural mandate for biblical counseling. In the first five training sessions, the participants were challenged to embrace the scriptural calling for mature believers to bring others to maturity in Christ, the realization that believers have all they need in Christ to see lives transformed into his image, and the understanding that a believer is to live a life consecrated solely to God. In addition, the scriptural responsibilities for a biblical counselor were detailed and the pattern of the life of Christ was presented as a blueprint for the church. As the doctrinal groundwork for biblical counseling was created, the participants were able to incorporate this knowledge during the six sessions dedicated to the specific counseling topics which most often surface in the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue Baptist Church, marriage issues, discouragement, fear, addictions, anger, and forgiveness.

A comparison of the pre and post-training surveys reveal the extent to which the participants were able to integrate a biblical perspective of counseling with specific life issues. Prior to the training sessions, 50 percent of the participants indicated they had a good understanding of the heart issues that affect marriage and knew how to address them biblically compared to a 70 percent affirmative response subsequent to the training. Regarding the issue of discouragement, the pre-survey questionnaire disclosed that 46 percent of the respondents understood the heart issues that impact discouragement and knew how to counsel them compared to the post-training response of 81 percent. On the subject of fear, 35 percent designated in the pre-survey questionnaire that they had a good understanding of the heart issues that affect it and knew how to counsel someone in this area. In the post-survey questionnaire, that number increased to 69 percent of the

participants.

The issues of addictions and anger showed the most substantial increase in the participants' understanding of the heart issues related to these problems. In the pre-survey questionnaire, only 31 percent of the participants marked that they had a good understanding of the heart issues relating to addictions and how to counsel a person mired in this sin. After the training, 73 percent of the Life Group leaders responded that they had a good understanding of the heart issues that affect addictions and knew how to biblically address them, an increase of 42 percent. The data revealed an identical increase regarding the respondents understanding of the heart issues related to anger. The pre-survey questionnaire response showed that 35 percent of the participants had a good understanding of the heart issues surrounding anger and knew how to counsel someone struggling in this area. The results from the post-training survey demonstrated that number had increased to 77 percent. The final issue discussed in the curriculum was forgiveness. Prior to the project, 54 percent of the participants felt they had a good understanding of the heart issues that affect forgiveness and how to counsel someone struggling in this frequently presented issue; in the post-training survey, this number had grown to 85 percent. The data revealed that the Life Group leaders were more equipped to address the core issues of biblical counseling and possessed an understanding of the heart issues which accompany specific sin issues after they completed the training curriculum.

The fourth goal was to develop a curriculum to train Life Group leaders to counsel members of their Life Group from a biblical perspective. To address this goal, an eleven week curriculum was developed and taught to the participants. The first five

sessions were primarily doctrinal in nature, examining the core issues of biblical counseling. The final six sessions were practical, examining how to apply the previous doctrinal studies to the life situations of marriage, discouragement, fear, addictions, anger, and forgiveness. This curriculum will continue to be utilized at Bellevue Baptist Church to give biblical counseling training to Life Group leaders.

The fifth goal of the project was to enhance my ability to teach the biblical principles that address the issues of life. Through this project, I was challenged to solidify my own understanding of the foundational truths of biblical counseling so that I could teach those truths in a clear and precise manner. Developing a curriculum also forced me to examine the best way to communicate an effective biblical counseling approach to the participants. Through the creation and utilization of a weekly power point presentation and corresponding handouts my ability to teach biblical principles addressing life issues was strengthened.

Strengths of the Project

The project to train Life Group leaders to counsel from a biblical perspective had four recognizable strengths. First, the most significant strength of the project was the commitment to Scripture as the basis for biblical counseling. The biblical mandate for counseling according to God's Word was the foundation upon which the curriculum was built. The five doctrinal sessions and the six sessions addressing specific issues were approached solely from a biblical viewpoint. Every assertion was supported by Scripture and verses relating to the specific weekly topics were assigned for memorization throughout the training.

Second, the training emphasis was embraced by the pastor and the educational

staff. The senior pastor communicated to the associate pastor who oversees the education ministry that the training of Bellevue's lay people in the area of biblical counseling must become a greater priority. The education staff realized the benefit of training Life Group leaders to counsel the members in their Life Groups so that they could more effectively minister to the Body of Christ. In addition, the Biblical Counseling Ministry supported my efforts as a way to bring the counseling ministry into the mainstream of church life.

A third strength of the project was the commitment of the participants to be trained to counsel from a biblical perspective. Several of the participating Life Group leaders had previously been scarred by counseling methods that were Christian in name, but not in form. These members, in particular, grasped the necessity to ground all counseling in Scripture. In addition, some of the leaders were already counseling people in their Life Group and they were hungry to learn how to counsel from a biblical perspective. The desire of the participants to be trained helped to facilitate meaningful discussions during the training and in subsequent conversations. Many of the participants expressed a desire to continue their training in biblical counseling, with 31 percent of those trained signing up to be an observer during biblical counseling sessions conducted through the Biblical Counseling Ministry at Bellevue Baptist Church.

The fourth strength of the project was the structure of the training module. The initial five areas of doctrinal study enabled the students to see what God addresses in His Word is not simply behavior, but the heart. Additionally, this approach enabled Life Group leaders to see that biblical counseling is not Freudian in nature, but is a saturation of the heart of man with the claims of Christ. The subsequent six sessions then applied those doctrinal truths to the specific issues most commonly presented by counselees in

the Biblical Counseling at Bellevue.

Weaknesses of the Project

While the curriculum for the project concentrated on six practical areas of counseling, the concepts would have been applied more effectively had the participants been involved in some hands-on training, in particular case studies and role play. During the weekly training sessions, I shared counseling experiences I had encountered, the counsel I had given in those sessions, and also explained the reasons why I gave that counsel. However, in retrospect, the inclusion of case studies would have allowed the class members to discover what counsel they would give when confronted with various situations. Initially, case studies could be examined in the form of an open class discussion, followed by homework assignments where the participants would be asked to write out their counsel and provide the reasons why they would give this counsel. In addition to case studies, role play would have been a helpful exercise to reveal the steps to take in biblical counseling to expose the heart issues which need to be addressed.

The size of the class could also be considered a weakness of the project. There were twenty-seven individuals who completed the training. Since Bellevue is a sizeable church, I felt it was necessary to have a large enough group of leaders participate so that an impact would be evident in the Life Groups at church. While we had open and meaningful discussion during every session, it could have been more impactful if there had been a smaller number of participants.

In addition, the time duration for the training sessions was a weakness. The time slot appropriated was Wednesday evenings from 6:30-7:30 p. m., the generally recognized discipleship training time at Bellevue Baptist Church. Had the project been

scheduled for a time such as Sunday afternoon, the duration of the class could have been extended, but the attendance would have been negatively impacted since that time slot is typically reserved for other meetings. While there was consistent attendance and participation on Wednesday evenings, the length of the class limited the ability to discuss and apply the scriptural truths to the extent I would have preferred.

What I Would Do Differently

In retrospect, one aspect of the project I would conduct differently is to give greater thought and planning as to what the next step would be for the twenty-seven participants who completed the project. During the eleven week training session, the Life Group leaders were exhorted and equipped to be engaged in biblical counseling; however, the project ended without a specific follow-up plan in place. The weeks that have followed the completion of project have been spent writing the final portion of the project rather than contacting the people who went through the class to see how they are implementing the truths they were taught. I believe participants have been stirred by God to see lives transformed and continued encouragement to keep them on that path is needed.

In addition, training believers to counsel other believers is a long term project, not simply an eleven week class. While the data from the pre and post-survey questionnaires indicated that the participants grew in their abilities to counsel from a biblical perspective, I look forward to finishing the written portion of the project so I can become more engaged in assisting people who have expressed a desire to continue to mature in being able to give biblical counsel to the body of Christ. The written project was the foundation; the on-going equipping of the saints is the edifice the Lord wants to

construct. I am formatting steps of action to address both of these needs.

Theological Reflections

The project was based upon the truth that the Word of God commands the people of God to engage one another in counsel that is not constructed upon the opinion or thoughts of men, but on the revealed truth of God's Word. As the Creator of man, God knows best what is needed if man is to experience the life that He intends for him to live. Much of the difficulty experienced in counseling situations springs from the faulty logic, first seen in the serpent's lie to Eve, that man is wise enough in his own eyes to know what he needs to live a fulfilling life. On the contrary, it is only as one begins with God and His will for man that one can expect to understand the reality of what man was truly created for, the glory God. As the believer lives for God's glory, he will experience the lasting satisfaction God created him to know.

As believers are committed to this God-centered life, their hearts being filled by the Word of God, they learn that God has called them to minister to one another, "with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to God" (Col 3:16). From the overflow of their heart, mature believers will minister to others.

Admonishing, biblical counseling, is not calling someone to live in a moral way, but rather in a spiritual manner, building upon the truth that man's life is rooted and grounded in God. When man draws his life from God for the glory of God, he is living according to God's intentional design, in a right relationship with Him. Much of the futility of modern day counseling is due to the fact that counselors, sometimes even Christian counselors, try to teach people the way to live rather than pointing them to the

reason to live, the glory of God.

God's will is for His children to learn that He has given them all they need for life and godliness through the personal knowledge of Himself. As this foundational reason for living is settled, and man begins to understand that his identity is who he is in Christ, he is then in a position to address the struggles of sin and suffering. By adhering to God's command to admonish other believers to live in obedience to God, mature believers, equipped with biblical truth, will conform to God's calling on their lives to see others transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Personal Reflections

At the beginning of my doctoral program, I learned that I would be completing a project that was of a practical nature. After much prayer and study, I sensed the need to pursue the subject of my project, "Equipping Life Group Leaders to Provide Biblical Counseling at Bellevue Baptist Church." While I anticipated the endeavor would be profitable, it was not until I completed the project that my eyes were opened to the value it has added to my life and the anticipated significance it will add to the body of Christ at Bellevue.

Gaining a transferable knowledge regarding biblical counseling has been a rewarding process. Sitting in a seminary class gleaned wisdom about how to biblically address the sin and suffering people encounter in this fallen world is enlightening. However, to have the great joy to share some of those truths with others has been satisfying. While I readily confess that my knowledge regarding the training of biblical counselors is foundational, this project has been a fulfilling first step.

As I taught Life Group leaders at Bellevue, I witnessed people who were

committed to dealing with issues from a biblical point of view, but did not understand how to address the deeper heart issues such as idols of the heart. They had a tremendous zeal; they simply needed more knowledge. Many participants expressed appreciation for exposing them to truths they had never considered. Some had experienced painful counseling times with other types of so called Christian counseling and were overjoyed to learn that there is a biblical way to address life issues.

Conclusion

A comparison of the objective data collected in the pre and post-training surveys indicate that the participants in the project experienced considerable growth in their ability to counsel from a biblical perspective. The feedback from the training has been positive, resulting in the educational staff asking me to conduct training sessions for in-reach leaders from the adult Life Groups at Bellevue. The purpose of these sessions will be to help this group of leaders grasp the truth that true in-reach is more than phone calls and letters, in-reach is living out Paul's exhortation to be "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another" (Rom 15:14). These sessions will be coupled with a mentoring segment to assist these leaders as they encounter different counseling situations. In addition, I will be teaching the curriculum again in the near future at Bellevue to another section of Life Group leaders.

Although I had anticipated a sense of relief at the conclusion of the project, I have actually experienced a feeling of expectation regarding the continued ramifications from this project among the body of Christ at Bellevue Baptist Church. The project has garnered the full support of the pastor, the educational staff, and the biblical counseling staff. The eventual goal is to have a minimum of two leaders from every adult Life

Group at Bellevue complete the training curriculum. I am grateful to God for His blessing on this work and look forward to His continued direction in equipping the Life Group leaders at Bellevue Baptist Church to be used to bring other believers to maturity in Christ.

APPENDIX
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

1. Pre and post-seminar questionnaire

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine your understanding of the principles of biblical counseling. This research is being conducted by Bill Street for purposes of evaluating the efficacy of this class as part of a doctoral project. In this research, you will be asked to complete the questionnaire regarding your understanding of biblical counseling. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential* and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Life Group: _____

Number of years you have been a Christian: _____

Number of years you have been a member of Bellevue: _____

Number of years you have been a member of your Life Group: _____

Biblical Counseling

1. How often do people come to you with spiritual problems?

Monthly Weekly Daily Seldom

2. I am aware of God's commands to counsel other Christians, even when I am uncertain of what to say.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. When someone has a struggle in their life they should seek help from a licensed professional.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I am knowledgeable of the issues relating to biblical counseling.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I have a desire to help other Christians address life issues from a biblical perspective.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

MARRIAGE

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling in his or her marriage.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart issues that affect marriage difficulties and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone struggling in his or her marriage is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe someone has a limited amount of control in a struggling marriage.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

DISCOURAGEMENT

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling with discouragement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart issues that affect discouragement and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone struggling with discouragement is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe someone has a limited control over discouragement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

FEAR

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling with fear.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart issues that affect fear and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone struggling with fear is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe someone has a limited control over fear.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

ADDICTIONS

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling with addictions.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart issues that affect addictions and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone who struggles with addictions is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe that someone has a limited control over addictions.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

ANGER

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling with anger.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart issues that affect anger and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone struggling with anger is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe someone has a limited amount of control over anger.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

FORGIVENESS

1. I feel competent to counsel someone struggling with forgiveness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have a good understanding of the heart problems that affect forgiveness and know how to biblically address them.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I believe someone struggling with forgiveness is primarily dealing with a spiritual issue.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe someone has a limited amount of control over forgiveness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING LIFE GROUP LEADERS TO PROVIDE BIBLICAL COUNSELING AT BELLEVUE BAPTIST CHURCH, CORDOVA, TENNESSEE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Chairperson: Dr. Heath Lambert

This project sought to equip Life Group leaders at Bellevue Baptist Church to provide biblical counseling to members of their Life Groups and others. Chapter 1 details the need for the project. The context and details of the project are also included.

Chapter 2 establishes a biblical basis for the project by exploring five passages of Scripture that speak to what biblical counseling is and how it is accomplished. These passages lay a foundation to demonstrate the sufficiency of the Word of God to address the six specific life issues targeted in this project.

Chapter 3 examines the basic beliefs of two schools of counseling, integrationist and biblical counseling. The two perspectives are evaluated in three areas: the acknowledgement of God and the sufficiency of His Word, the approach to addressing life issues, and the accomplishment of the counseling concepts. In addition, the specific life issues of marriage, depression, fear, addiction, anger, and forgiveness will be inspected from each viewpoint.

Chapter 4 explains the implementation of the project. The participant selection process, the research instrumentation, schedule of the training, and the curriculum are stated and explained.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the impact of the project on those trained. The strengths and the weaknesses of the project are discussed.

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