EQUIPPING SERVANT MINISTERS OF CORNERSTONE CHURCH

IN WEST LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, TO ADDRESS

COMMON SPIRITUAL ISSUES

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A Ministry Research Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

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by

Scott Harper Mehl

May 2012

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING SERVANT MINISTERS OF CORNERSTONE CHURCH

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Read and Approved by:


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Date_____

To the Servant Ministers of Cornerstone Church

(both present and future),

that you may be convinced of and confident in

the sufficiency of Christ and his Word for all of life

and to

Lara

whose constant sacrifices, support, and love

have made this project

and every aspect of ministry

both possible and joyful

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Appendix

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*Arch Gen Psychiatry*   *Archive of General Psychiatry*

*J Cog Psychother*   *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*

*J Psychol Christ*   *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*

*JACH*   *Journal of American College Health*

*JBC*   *Journal of Biblical Counseling*

*JETS*   *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

*MSJ*   *Master's Seminary Journal*

*N Engl J Med*   *New England Journal of Medicine*

*Psy Rev*   *Psychological Review*

*PLoS Medicine*   *Public Library of Science Journal of Medicine*

# LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

This project is the culmination of an overwhelming amount of grace given by our loving and patient God. While this project is the product of countless hours of research, discussion, and writing, it is his multifaceted grace that has empowered this project and the ministry that will be produced through it.

First, God's grace has been demonstrated in the incredible servant ministers that he has gifted to Cornerstone Church. Those that minister in our midst are an incredible joy to serve and minister alongside of, and their encouragement, excitement, teachability, and passion have made this project a sweet pleasure to undertake. This project was designed for the sake of God's glory in their lives, and to see God's work exceed my expectations through this relatively small amount of equipping is a true blessing.

God's grace has also been demonstrated through this project in the ministry partners that God has gifted to me at Cornerstone Church. "Wise love in action" has been demonstrated towards me more powerfully by the men I serve alongside of, than by anyone else. Jim Leonard and Steve Campbell have taught me what wise, patient love looks like through their impeccable example throughout the duration of this project. In addition, the content of this project represents, in a very real way, not only my thoughts and knowledge, but those of Brian Colmery and Matt Kleinhans as well. So much of my practical theology has been shaped by Brian and Matt that many of the ideas represented in this project could be attributed to them. In addition, the writing in this project would be far less clear were it not for Matt's sacrificial, careful, and thoughtful editing.

God's grace has been poured out, as well, through the guidance, tutelage, and

great wisdom of the faculty of Southern Seminary, specifically Dr. Stuart Scott and Dr. Heath Lambert. The entire trajectory of my ministry has been forever altered, inspired, and brought more into line with Scripture through the teaching and friendship of these two incredible professors. In addition, the partnership and encouragement of my fellow students, most notably Bill Street and Matt Harness, has transformed this potentially lonely process into a consistent source of encouragement and joy.

God's grace has also shaped this project through the tireless ministries of so many people that I have never met. I praise God for his grace to the church in the form of brothers and sisters like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jay Adams, David Powlison, Ed Welch, and Elyse Fitzpatrick. Their ministries and passions (along with so many others) are echoed in my own, and will continue to be for generations to come.

Of course, the second greatest grace of God in my life is the gift of my wife, Lara. While God's grace through Lara was demonstrated in this project both through tireless editing and participation in the class itself, those actions only scrape the surface of how God has blessed my life through her. So much of my ministry, wisdom, knowledge, and love are a product of God's gift of her in my life. I undoubtedly have learned more at her feet than she will ever know.

And, finally, the greatest grace of God in this project and in my life is the grace of salvation and redemption that God has so freely given to me through Christ. The basis of so much of this project is the truth of the gospel, a gospel that has so radically transformed me from a wicked enemy to a cherished and beloved son. I could not begin to deserve any of the grace of God enumerated here. But of all of this unbelievable grace, it is for this last and most fundamental grace that I am most entirely overwhelmed. May he, and he alone, receive any glory that may be produced from the pages that follow.

Scott Harper Mehl

Los Angeles, California

May 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

**Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to further equip those doing personal ministry at Cornerstone Church in West Los Angeles, CA to disciple and counsel others who are struggling with the spiritual and emotional issues common to their context.

**Goals**

This project had six goals. These goals were the means by which the effectiveness of this project was measured. The first goal was to increase servant ministers' understanding of the spiritual issues that are most common to their context. In order to increase this understanding this project spent time discussing the experience of those who are struggling in order to increase the servant ministers' empathy for those to whom they are ministering. In order to disciple and counsel others effectively, servant ministers must understand, on some level, the experience of others and the seriousness of those issues even if they have never experienced them themselves.

The second goal was to increase servant ministers' knowledge of the biblical nature of these spiritual issues. In order to disciple and counsel others effectively, servant ministers must also have a clear biblical understanding of the nature of these problems and how to address them using the principles and exhortations of Scripture.

The third goal was to increase servant ministers' knowledge of relevant Scriptures that may be helpful both to encourage and exhort someone who is struggling with these particular spiritual issues. God's way of communicating with His children in

any situation is through his Word, so it is imperative for those who seek to disciple and counsel others to know his Word and be able to use it effectively.

The fourth goal was to increase servant ministers' wisdom in ministering the Word of God to those who are struggling with these particular issues. While wisdom is difficult to measure, it is imperative for a Christian counselor or discipler to grow in wisdom as well as knowledge because knowledge that is not carefully and lovingly applied can have disastrous effects on those who are struggling with serious spiritual and emotional issues. A major component of this kind of wisdom that was taught and assessed in this project was the counselor or discipler's ability to identify their brother or sister as both a sinner and a sufferer, and to minister to them appropriately in their suffering and their sin.

The fifth goal was to increase the servant ministers' confidence in walking with people through difficult spiritual issues. One of the greatest weaknesses of many of our servant ministers at Cornerstone has been their lack of confidence when it comes to ministering the Word of God to others. The increase in knowledge in the aforementioned areas was designed to also produce an increase in confidence in their own Spirit-empowered abilities.

The final goal was personal. As a result of this project, I sought to enhance my own teaching skill and ability. I hoped to develop my own pedagogy in a way that enhanced student learning, involvement, and engagement.

## Ministry Context

The context for this project was Cornerstone Church of West Los Angeles.

### West Los Angeles

The culture of West Los Angeles, as in most large Western cities, is highly psychologized. While statistics regarding counseling and the use of psychotropic medications are hard to come by, personal problems such as depression, anxiety, eating

disorders, and loneliness are rampant. West Los Angeles is also a highly individualized culture, which feeds the prevalence of personal problems and contributes to the demand for psychologists and psychiatrists as many people have little or no natural support system. This psychologized and individualized culture is frequently reflected in the church. Many Christians adopt the lifestyle and worldview of the surrounding culture, not realizing (whether by ignorance or by choice) that Scripture speaks a different message of hope in the midst of personal problems.

West Los Angeles is a general term that describes the section of Los Angeles consisting of Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades, Brentwood, Westwood, West LA,[1] Venice, Palms, Mar Vista, Marina Del Rey, Culver City and various other surrounding communities. Depending on which areas are included, the population of this region is between 500,000 and 1 million people. While people who attend Cornerstone can be found in all of these different communities, the vast majority of the church body resides in Santa Monica, Westwood, West LA, Palms/Mar Vista and Culver City. In these five areas, the total population is just over 350,000 people, 40 percent of whom are between the ages of 20 and 39.[2] In addition, Westwood is the home of the University of California, Los Angeles, a school with an undergraduate enrollment of almost 40,000

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[1]While West Los Angeles is a general term that describes a large section of the city, it is a label used for one particular neighborhood as well. Because of the inherent confusion, "West Los Angeles" will be used to describe the larger, more general part of the city, while "West LA" will be used to describe the smaller neighborhood.

[2]City of Los Angeles Census 2000 Reports, "Age Cohorts: West Los Angeles Community Plan Area" [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://cityplanning.lacity.org/DRU/C2K/C2KFrame.cfm?geo=cp&loc=WLA&sgo=ct&rpt=CoA&yrx=dummy; Internet. City of Los Angeles Census 2000 Reports, "Age Cohorts, Westwood Community Plan Area" [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://cityplanning.lacity.org/DRU/C2K/C2KFrame.cfm?geo=cp&loc=Wwd&sgo=ct&rpt=CoA&yrx=dummy; Internet. City of Los Angeles Census 2000 Reports, "Age Cohorts, Palms-Mar Vista-del Rey Community Plan Area" [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://cityplanning.lacity.org/DRU/C2K/C2KFrame.cfm?geo=cp&loc=Plm&sgo=ct&rpt=CoA&yrx=dummy; Internet. US Census Bureau Quick Facts Culver City, California [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0617568.html; Internet. City of Santa Monica Economic and Demographic Profile [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://www01.smgov.net/business/demographics/2006age.htm; Internet.

students[3] who are not typically reflected in census data.[4]  These five areas cover a total geographic area of about 32 square miles,[5] which means that there are about 11,000 people per square mile in this densely populated urban area.

**Cornerstone Church**

Cornerstone is the product of a church merger between First Baptist Church of West Los Angeles (established in 1901) and Shoreline Community Church (established in 2005). This merger took place during the development of this project in May 2011. This project was originally designed for the servant ministers of Shoreline Church, and was still ultimately applied with the same individuals it was designed for.  However, this application took place in the broader context of a larger and more diverse church.

**Shoreline Church.**  Shoreline was founded in October 2005 as a church plant from Cornerstone Community Church in Simi Valley, California.  The two founding co-pastors were myself and Brian Colmery, both graduates of The Master's Seminary. Shoreline was founded in response to the significant lack of Bible-teaching, gospel-centered churches in West Los Angeles and the largely secular young-adult population in the area.

From its inception in 2005 to 2010, Shoreline grew to an average attendance of approximately 200 people per weekend.  Almost all of the 200-plus attendees at Shoreline were part of the 20-39 year-old demographic block.  Of the few people who would fall outside of this block, most were either college freshmen or children under the age of four.  In addition to these age demographics, the population at Shoreline

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[3]Quick Facts: UCLA Undergraduate Admission [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://www.admissions.ucla.edu/campusprofile.htm; Internet.

[4]Census on Campus [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2010; available from http://2010.census.gov/campus/; Internet.

[5]See footnote 1.

(mirroring the population of West Los Angeles) could also generally be described as educated and transient.

Almost everyone at Shoreline had either obtained or was in the process of obtaining a bachelor's degree. In addition, a number of people had obtained or were in the process of obtaining various graduate degrees in subjects ranging from social work to molecular biology. Furthermore, as is the case with the general population in West Los Angeles, the population at Shoreline was very transient. Every year, an estimated fifth to a quarter of the congregation would leave the area either for work, graduate school, or to return to their home city or state. As a result, Shoreline often functioned as an equipping and sending church where people spent a few years of their early adulthood in preparation for a life that would be lived elsewhere. However, in the past few years more and more people from the church had made the decision to stay in West Los Angeles and were planning to invest their lives in this largely secular community for the sake of the gospel.

Shoreline did not own a physical facility, but the church gathered in a one-screen movie theater for worship on Sunday mornings. Throughout the week, the vast majority of ministry would take place in people's homes (mostly apartments) and in local coffee shops and restaurants. Each week, ten coed community groups, consisting of 10-20 people each, met throughout West Los Angeles. It is in the context of the relationships in these community groups that the majority of ministry and discipleship took place at Shoreline.[6]

**Cornerstone Church.** In some ways, the new ministry context of Cornerstone Church is very different than that of Shoreline, but in the most fundamental ways it is

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[6]Of course ministry takes place in a plethora of different contexts and relationships (the diversity of which is too great to enumerate here); however, community groups were the primary context for ministry within Shoreline, which continues to be the case at Cornerstone as well.

exactly the same.  In short, Cornerstone was founded when the pastors of Shoreline (Brian Colmery and myself) and the pastors of First Baptist Church of West LA (Jim Leonard and Kevin Elwell) determined that our people could glorify God, love one another, and reach the lost in West LA better together as one church than we could apart.

In stark contrast to the demographics of Shoreline, Cornerstone's now 400 attendees range in age from zero to ninety-nine.  There are significant groups of church members born in each decade since the 1920s.  In fact, the age group that constituted the bulk of the population at Shoreline was the age group that was missing from the First Baptist congregation, and so together Cornerstone is a fully age-diversified church.

Many of the other demographic aspects of Shoreline, however, are still mirrored in Cornerstone.  The congregation is generally well educated and racially diverse.  Even though there is greater life-stage diversity, many in the church are still fairly transient as that is the nature of many of the industries served by those in West LA, most notably the entertainment industry.  Therefore, while Cornerstone has many more inroads into the stable communities of West LA than Shoreline did, Cornerstone is still envisioned as a training and sending church (which First Baptist had traditionally been as well).

In addition, what Shoreline lacked in a physical facility, Cornerstone now has in spades.  Cornerstone resides on the same parcel of land (a full city block) where First Baptist had resided since 1924.  The presence of a facility has made many things easier for the church, however, the bulk of ministry still takes place not on the church campus but in church members' homes and in restaurants, parks, and coffee shops throughout the city.  Relationships, facilitated by ongoing and multiplying community groups, continue to be the context for the vast majority of ministry at Cornerstone.

Spiritually, Cornerstone is a very healthy church.  As pastors[7], we are

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[7]At Cornerstone we use the more modern term "pastor" and the biblical term "elder" interchangeably.

constantly encouraged by the growth that God is producing among the people in our midst.  Baptisms of new believers are a regular occurrence, and many of those who have been Christians for a long time are continuing to grow in Christ-likeness.  Like any church, Cornerstone is simply a gathering of forgiven sinners, and the effect of the remaining sin in our hearts is constantly felt as well.  However, the general trend of the church is growth towards Christ-likeness, something for which we are overwhelmingly grateful.

In addition to protecting and watching over the flock of God (Heb 13:17), the pastors at Cornerstone understand one of our primary roles in the church to be that of equipping the members of the church for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-14).  We facilitate this equipping through the public ministry of the Word in the form of Sunday morning services and Sunday evening equipping classes.  We also facilitate this equipping through the personal ministry of the Word in the form of our personal discipleship relationships with servant ministers and through community groups which facilitate individual relationships and discipleship throughout the entire church.

At Cornerstone, we equip on Sunday mornings through the exegetical preaching of God's Word.  We primarily preach through books of the Bible, applying the authorial intent to modern life and demonstrating how each passage illuminates the truth of the gospel and the person of Christ.  Furthermore, we also equip through a number of different classes on topics such as: church membership, Bible study methods, the gospel in all of life, gospel-centered change and interpersonal ministry, and gospel-motivated missional living.  All of our community group leaders, as well as a number of other servant ministers and church members, attend these classes. These six-week classes tend to be an effective equipping tool since the classroom is a forum that so many of our people are accustomed to after attending college.  The equipping in these classes is disseminated through the participants into the rest of the church in the context of community groups and personal relationships.

Another important way that we equip our servant ministers is through our personal relationships and individual discipleship with them. Through relationships, we are able to help people practically apply the truth of Scripture and the message of the gospel to their unique lives and circumstances. In this way, we are also able to model to our leaders and other servant ministers what their relationships with those in their communities ought to look like.

As a church, Cornerstone is strongly committed to the inerrancy and sufficiency of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4), the power and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to effect change through his Word in the hearts of all believers (John 16:7-15; Rom 8:1-11), and the primacy and sufficiency of the body of Christ as the means God has designed to minister his Word to all people (Gal 6:1-5; John 17:20-23). As a result, our priorities in ministry include prayer, exegetical teaching, relational community, missional living, and a doxological focus. With these priorities, our focus in every aspect of ministry, regardless of whether it is to believers or non-believers, is the message of the gospel and the person of Christ.

Cornerstone is a unique church. Being the product of a successful church merger, and so generationally diverse (in both membership and leadership), we are often in awe of what God is doing in our midst. Our goal, above all, is to be a church that is focused on Christ and living lives that are in step with the gospel. We have failed at this goal numerous times over the years as our need for greater sanctification has been reflected in our pride, our misplaced zeal, and our temptation to discouragement (among many other shortcomings); however, just as we have seen God's transforming work in the lives of so many individuals, we have also seen the result of those changes in the continued transformation of the church into the body of Christ he is building us into by his grace.

**Rationale**

The work of God at Cornerstone is far from complete. There is much more we need to learn, and there are many areas of particular weakness that we hope, by God's grace, to address in the coming years and decades. One particularly pressing weakness that was addressed in this project has been the need for all those who minister to one another to be equipped with a practical understanding of how Scripture speaks to the real problems in life, and wisdom to be able to minister that truth in love to those who need it.

The prevalence of a psychologized and individualized culture both inside and outside of the church establishes a significant need for those in the church to be equipped with biblical truth regarding the multifaceted problems in living that people experience. The same personal problems that are experienced by those outside the church are oftentimes experienced by those inside the church. The difference may not be in the experience, but in how the experience is handled and understood in light of a biblical worldview. It is for this reason that the church must be equipped in this kind of practical theology in order to effectively minister to those inside the church and reach those outside the church.

As a pastor, I have met with a number of different people who are struggling with a wide variety of personal problems. I have sat with people who are struggling with heterosexual lust, homosexual lust, obsessive compulsions, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, drug addictions, workaholism, hopelessness in the face of singleness, Tourette's syndrome, loneliness, family conflicts, pornography addictions, recovery from sexual and physical abuse, eating disorders, and many others. And that is just among our church members. Each of these labels represents a real problem that a real person is struggling with, and each of these Christian strugglers is living life in community with other strugglers – brothers and sisters who are called to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:1-2) and help one another when they are weak (1 Thess 5:14). Each of these people is also told that through the knowledge of Christ that is available in his Word, they have been

given everything they need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3).  While many people at Cornerstone believe in the sufficiency of Scripture and feel the responsibility to minister to those around them, they are still oftentimes at a loss as to how Scripture speaks to such emotional/spiritual problems, and what to do when those problems are brought to them.

This deficiency is not unique to Cornerstone.  Spiritual/emotional problems in life are as universal as the problem of sin.  However, as recently as a half-century ago, the American church had no comprehensive biblical theory for how to address them.  In the 1950s and 60s, for example, "Problems in living were addressed by a hybrid of highly rationalistic, moralistic, mystical, and emotionalistic persuasion that aimed to accomplish a miraculous, instantaneous, absolute change."[8]

Because of a number of different factors,[9] the landscape of personal ministry has changed over the past few decades among many evangelical pastors and theologians.[10]  Unfortunately, it seems the landscape of mutual personal ministry among the members of evangelical churches has changed much less drastically.  Over the past forty years the church has begun to re-take the mantle of addressing the complexity of problems that exist in the human heart, but the professionalisation of "soul care" has left the vast majority of Christians feeling ill-equipped at best and unneeded at worst.  Even in churches where a biblical understanding of God, people, and change is taught, people who struggle with issues such as the ones mentioned above are often referred to the "professionals" (i.e. pastors or counselors) and God's biblical vision for a mutually edifying and ministering body is abandoned.[11]

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[8]David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement*, (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2008).

[9]Most notably: the ministries of men such as Jay Adams and David Powlison as well as organizations such as NANC and CCEF.

[10]Heath Lambert, "The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 22-38.

[11]Cf. Eph 4:11-16.

I have no illusion that a project like this has solved this problem at Cornerstone, or even that it has turned the people involved into fully competent personal ministers; that will assuredly be a lifelong journey for us all. However I do believe that by demonstrating how to biblically address some of the most common spiritual issues that exist among Christians in West Los Angeles, we have been able to take an important step forward as a church in equipping servant ministers at Cornerstone for the work of personal ministry.

Fortunately, this project has come on the heels of two years of equipping that had already taken place for these servant ministers. Each person that participated in this project had already completed at least four equipping classes over the previous two years.[12] For this reason, the focus of this project was not on the theory or methodology of personal ministry, but on the loving and wise application of the truth of Scripture to those in the church who are struggling with these specific, common, spiritual issues. In so doing, we hoped to take one more step forward as a church in our pursuit of being faithful to Christ's call to love one another just as he loved us (John 13:34).

## Definitions

Since this project is part of the biblical counseling program, it is first important to define *biblical counseling* and how it has been applied in this project.

Most simply, biblical counseling is theology lovingly applied. Biblical counseling is the loving application of the truth and hope of the gospel, the person of God, and the biblical reality of the world to the experiences and intricacies of the human life. These experiences and intricacies necessarily include the devastating effects of sin

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[12]The four classes will have been taken in order and are: (1) How to Study Your Bible (an introduction to hermeneutics and Scriptural application); (2) Your Place in God's Church (an introduction to a gospel-centered life and the understanding of the church as a missional community); (3) How People Change 1 & 2 (an introduction to the Biblical dynamics of change and a methodology of personal ministry); (4) Living on Mission 1 & 2 (an introduction to biblical missional/evangelistic living and a methodology of life with unbelievers in West Los Angeles).

and a fallen world, which produce all spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems in living.

David Powlison identifies two different meanings of biblical counseling which provide a helpful foil. "On the one hand, 'biblical counseling' is a *goal* to live and die for....Restoring Christ to counseling and counseling to the church is a direction, a task, a trajectory."[13] This project falls along that trajectory. In this way, the goal of this project was to identify and apply the ways that the gospel, the work of the Spirit, the ministry of the church and the truth of Scripture impact Christians who are struggling with particular spiritual issues. Consequently, this project was designed to continue the work of "restoring Christ to counseling and counseling to the church." In other words, to apply "biblical counseling."

"On the other hand," Powlison continues, "'biblical counseling' is a *current achievement*, partial and imperfect like all human achievements."[14] In this sense, this project reflects the insights, teachings and methods of the biblical counseling movement. The biblical counseling movement is currently the best reflection of Scriptural personal ministry in the church today. As a result, the goal of this project was to reflect the teachings of the biblical counseling movement where they accurately reflect Scripture and rely on the truth of the gospel. However, it must be conceded that, as biblical counseling is a "*current achievement*, partial and imperfect," this project inevitably is as well.

In summary, biblical counseling can be defined as the goal of living out practical theology in a way that accurately reflects the person and work of Christ. In the context of this project, this practical theology has been applied to specific spiritual issues, which also ought to be defined.

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

[14]Ibid.

*Spiritual issues* can be defined as any emotional, psychological, or spiritual problem in living that a person experiences that does not have a demonstrable organic cause. All emotional, psychological, and spiritual problems in living are, in one way or another, rooted in sin (through one's own sin, one's reaction to being sinned against, the presence of sin in the world, or some combination of these), and therefore ought to be considered spiritual issues.

Finally, at Cornerstone, in addition to the biblical office of elder held by both our lay and vocational pastors, we also recognize the biblical office of *servant ministers*. Servant minister is the name we use for what most English Bibles call "deacons."[15] Servant ministers are all those who serve the body of Christ in roles that require personal ministry to others (i.e. community group leaders, Sunday school teachers, ministry leaders, etc.).

## Limitations/Delimitations

The main limitation for this project was that it was limited to fifteen weeks. Only a limited amount of equipping can truly take place in such a short amount of time, and the ultimate efficacy and fruitfulness of this equipping will only be able to be seen in the context of more long-term relationships. As such, the only effects that could be measured were the short-term knowledge and experience gained.

There are also a few delimitations that were established for this project. The first delimitation was that the subject matter was limited to three general problems. Many more problems could have been addressed as well, but because of both the scope and goals of this project, it was determined that limiting the number of spiritual issues

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[15]1 Tim 3:8. While "deacon" is a transliteration of the greek word, διάκονος, "servant minister" is its translation. G. Abbot-Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950),107-108. We use the title "servant minister" in order to: (1) Provide some idea of the role of the office through the name, and (2) Avoid the cultural baggage that comes with the many different ideas and traditions regarding the role of "deacons" in the church.

addressed to three common and representative issues was best.

Another significant delimitation existed in the form of the project. The project covered three common spiritual issues in West Los Angeles. However, when ministering to real people with real problems, real situations and experiences can never simply be reduced to the labels given in this project. All those who struggle with "depression" or "sexual issues" are not alike, and while generalizations can be made and commonalities can be identified, it is important to remember that we are not dealing with nice, neat problems, but with messy and complex people.

The final delimitation set for this project was that all participants were required to have completed Cornerstone's four foundational equipping classes. Because of the nature of this project, it was important that those participating had some exposure to biblical hermeneutics, dynamics and methods of biblical change, and a biblical understanding of God's design for the church as a community of mutual ministers.

## Research Methodology

This project attempted to equip those who have been doing personal ministry at Cornerstone Church so that they would be able to disciple and counsel others struggling with the more prevalent spiritual and emotional issues in their context. This project attempted to do so by meeting the goals stated above through the class and personal ministry described here.

A select number of those who had completed Cornerstone's four foundational equipping classes were invited to participate in this project. The importance of this kind of training was explained to each of them, and they were encouraged to participate. Those who were willing to make the time commitment necessary for the class made up the participants of the project.

Two weeks before the beginning of the equipping class, each one of the participants was asked to complete a pre-class exam/questionnaire. This

exam/questionnaire sought to measure five items: (1) the participant's knowledge of the experience of the three spiritual issues to be addressed in class, (2) the participant's knowledge of the biblical nature of these spiritual issues, (3) the participant's knowledge of appropriate Scriptures that may be helpful to one struggling with these spiritual issues, (4) the participant's wisdom in ministering to one who is struggling with these spiritual issues, and (5) the participant's confidence in their own Spirit-empowered ability to walk with someone who is struggling with these spiritual issues. Participants were encouraged to use their Bibles and any other resources they had available to them in answering the questions on this exam/questionnaire. In addition, during this pre-class timeframe, out-of-class readings were assigned that complimented the content covered on each of the specific issues.

The 12-week class began with one week of reviewing material covered in the previous equipping classes for the sake of rooting the class discussion in the biblical model of change and methodology of personal ministry.

The next nine weeks were spent addressing the three identified spiritual issues, three weeks at a time. The three spiritual issues that were addressed were: depression, sexual issues, and eating disorders.[16] During the three weeks on each issue we spent time discussing five different aspects of each issue.

We discussed the personal experience of each problem. What is it like to experience this problem? How does it feel? What do people who struggle with it think? How is it similar to struggles that you experience?

We discussed the cultural experience of each problem. What do people who struggle with this problem hear from the culture around them? What are they likely to hear from their Christian friends? What are they likely to hear from their non-Christian

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[16]These three issues were identified as some of the most prevalent problems in our context by Cornerstone's community group leaders. Each of the leaders was asked to identify the personal/emotional/spiritual problems that they believed to be most prevalent among the people they knew. These three issues were the ones most repeatedly mentioned.

friends?  What would a Christian psychologist tell them?  What would a psychiatrist tell them?

We discussed the biblical nature of each problem.  What does Scripture say about the nature of this problem?  How does Scripture speak to those who struggle with this problem as sufferers?  How does Scripture speak to those who struggle with this problem as sinners?  How does the gospel apply to this problem?  In light of the gospel, what is a godly response to this problem?  What should a Christian's goals be in the midst of this problem?

We discussed some of the passages of Scripture that speak to this problem.  How do the main passages about the gospel and its work among sufferers and sinners speak to this problem?  What passages of Scripture speak uniquely to the experience of this problem?  What passages of Scripture speak uniquely to God's provision in the midst of this problem?

We discussed what it looks like to lovingly and wisely walk with someone through this problem.  What passages of Scripture should guide our words and actions in a situation like this?  What would cruel truth look like in the midst of this problem?  What would empty love look like in the midst of this problem?  What would "speaking the truth in love" look like in the midst of this problem?  How would you respond to a case study with this problem?

The final two weeks of class time were spent going over case studies in order to root the previous discussion in the complexities of real lives.  This involved class discussion on the specific actions and steps to be taken when ministering to a particular problem.

During the 12-week class, I also met with each participant individually (or together with their leadership partner) in order to answer any specific questions and help the participant apply what was being learned to their specific ministry situations.  I also met with each participant individually (or together with their leadership partner) the week

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after the class ended in order to answer any remaining questions, get feedback on the class, and personally evaluate how they had grown over the course of the class.

At three times during the 12-week class, I also met with a small focus group consisting of three class participants (one other elder, one community group leader, and one other servant minister). This focus group was asked to evaluate my teaching in order to help me identify ways I could improve my teaching so as to enhance student learning, involvement, and engagement.

The fifteenth (and final) week of the project, each of the participants was asked to complete a post-class exam/questionnaire that was identical to the pre-class exam/questionnaire. By comparing the pre-class and post-class questionnaires (in addition to the observations made in personal meetings), I assessed the effectiveness of the equipping class in regard to the stated goals.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR
MUTUAL PERSONAL MINISTRY

Countless theories abound regarding how people ought to understand and

address personal/spiritual/emotional problems.[1]  Unfortunately, this diversity is mirrored

in the church as well.[2]  Many Christians and non-Christians alike call these problems

"psychological problems."  They are also known by labels such as "emotional problems,"

"spiritual problems," "mental disorders," "chemical imbalances," or "problems in living."

This last label, "problems in living," while being the most general, is probably the most

accurate and user-friendly as each of the other options carries with it particular cultural

baggage depending on one's worldview and experience.  The one thing that everyone,

regardless of their background, can agree on, however, is that people have problems.

Christians ought not be surprised by the fact that people have problems.  In

light of the Fall, humanity lives in a broken world that is filled with sickness, weakness,

difficulty, sin, and death.  As Jesus asserted to his disciples shortly before he went to the

Cross, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33b).[3]  However, while it is true

[1]"A recent work identified 260 distinct schools of psychotherapy" (H. Strupp and D. Binder, *Psychotherapy in a New Key* [New York: Basic Books, 1984], quoted in Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991], 11).  This does not even include the multitude of biological and genetic therapies produced by neuroscience and psychiatry, some of the more popular self-help theories that are not tied to any actual scientific theory (e.g., Maslow's hierarchy of needs), or any other religious theories (e.g. Budhism, Scientology, etc.).

[2]For examples see Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*; Mark A. Yarhouse, Richard E. Butman and Barrett W. McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

[3]All biblical references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

that people have problems, it is also true that, in Christ, people have hope. As Jesus continues the previous thought, "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33c).

Scripture clearly affirms that the message of the gospel and the person of Christ are sufficient to address all problems in living that people experience (2 Pet 1:3-4). But, how? Does simply believing the gospel automatically get rid of all problems in living? The answer is obviously, "no." While Christians are promised that God is preparing for them a new heaven and new earth where "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Rev 21:4), they are still living on the "old earth" where death, mourning, crying and pain are all too familiar.

So, how are the gospel and person of Christ sufficient to address all problems in living? While this question could be answered, at least in part, from countless different pages in Scripture, this chapter focuses on six specific passages that provide a foundational understanding of how the truth of the gospel and person of Christ sufficiently address problems in living. The discussion first focuses on 2 Peter 1:3-4 where Peter makes the well-known assertion that the "knowledge of Christ" is sufficient for life and godliness.

Next, the focus then shifts to how God has chosen to mediate this sufficiency in the life of the Christian. God desires the message of the gospel of Christ and the truth about who he is to be ministered through his body and empowered by his Spirit. Ephesians 4:11-16 communicates how God desires the members of his body to mutually minister the gospel to one another, and John 14:26 and Galatians 5:22-25 teach that the truth and message of the gospel are powerless if not empowered by the constant and continuing work of the Spirit.

Finally, the chapter examines two examples of how the gospel of Christ ministers to people in the midst of their problems. Colossians 3:1-14 addresses problems

in living as they are caused by one's own sinful heart, and 1 Peter 1:3-7 addresses

problems in living as they are caused by the suffering that results from living in a fallen

world.

So, the discussion of the sufficiency of the gospel and person of Christ begins

by examining Peter's simple assertion that they truly are sufficient.

**The Gospel and Person of Christ are**
**Sufficient for All Christian Life:**
**2 Peter 1:3-4**

[Christ's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and
godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and
excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so
that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped
from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Pet 1:3-4)[4]

This passage is often referenced when discussing the sufficiency of Scripture

and the sufficiency of biblical Christianity to address problems in living, and for good

reason.  However, while the citing of this text as a proof-text can be helpful, the insight

that can be gained through careful exegetical study is far greater.

In a world where problems in living are inescapable, the search for an

explanation and a solution for those problems is universal.  So, when one reads in

Scripture that God has "granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness," such an

incredible truth seems too good to be true, and many believe that it is.  Peter puts special

emphasis on "all things" in this verse,[5] communicating to his readers that the scope of

God's provision is absolute.  However, when "life" and "godliness" take the form of

"problems in living" and "struggles in godliness," Christians are tempted to search

elsewhere for answers.  This search is usually fueled by ignorance as to the means by

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[4]Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary
(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 168.

[5]John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago:
Moody Publishers, 2005), 27.

which God has granted to his children everything they need, and it is a de facto denial of the wisdom, goodness, and provision of God, which he has so clearly here affirmed.

When Christians affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, skeptics, and far too many other Christians, expect to find answers in the Bible as if it were a topically organized encyclopedia of all problems in living.  However, Peter does not assert that God has granted all that one needs "in the Bible."  Instead, he affirms that God has granted all one needs "through the knowledge of him."

It is of the utmost importance to understand exactly what is meant here by the "knowledge of him."   Peter intends more than an intellectual knowledge that could be likened to knowing "about" someone, and he intends far more than an experiential knowledge as well.  Douglas Moo explains the nature of this knowledge simply and beautifully: "Knowledge refers to an intimate and informed relationship that is the product of conversion to the gospel."[6]  The knowledge by which one is given "all things that pertain to life and godliness" is a knowledge that can only be gained through trusting in the message of the gospel.  Furthermore, it is also a knowledge that, while dependent upon conversion, does not culminate at conversion.  Conversion is only the beginning, as Norman Hillyer writes, "The call of Christ is initially to personal faith in him.  But it is a call repeated all through the believer's life, a call to a deeper and richer understanding of the Person of Christ, and of his demands for spiritual growth and service."[7]

Of course, it is only in God's infallible Word that one can find the message of the gospel, or any truth about Christ or the Spirit for that matter, and in this sense it is the Word of God that is at the core of Christ's sufficiency.  Peter, himself, makes the connection between the "knowledge of Christ" and the Word of God by asserting that it

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[6]Douglas Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 42.

[7]Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude,* New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 160.

is through "his precious and very great promises" that one may become partakers of the

diving nature.  These promises are the very content of the Word of God, and the Word is

the only place where these objectively true promises can be found.  However, the

knowledge of Christ involves much more than an assent to certain truths *about* him and

his promises, but necessarily involves knowing him intimately and personally through

those truths.  But, how can one distinguish the difference?  J. I. Packer is helpful at this

point.

> How are we to do this?  How can we turn our knowledge *about* God into
> knowledge *of* God?  The rule for doing this is simple but demanding.  It is that we
> turn each truth that we learn *about* God into a matter for meditation *before* God,
> leading to prayer and praise *to* God.[8]

Intimately knowing God involves prayer, meditation upon his Word, and loving response.

It is this kind of active and interactive knowledge that Peter is referring to.

The sufficiency of this knowledge uniquely equips and enables Christians to

handle problems in living in ways that are unavailable to non-Christians and those that

look to other sources of wisdom and knowledge for help.  Peter goes on to communicate

that it is through this Word-informed knowledge that believers are granted "precious and

very great promises."  These promises are the avenue by which believers "become

partakers of the divine nature," which includes "having escaped from the corruption that

is in the world because of sinful desire."[9]  This "escape," which will be examined in the

later discussion of Colossians 3, results in the empowerment to address problems in

living in a God-glorifying way that does not perpetuate or increase those problems

through self-centered sin.  Regardless of the type of problems in living one is

experiencing, knowledge of Christ is completely sufficient to address them and to show

the way forward in the midst of them.  As Wayne Mack writes, "No higher knowledge,

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[8]J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 23.

[9]Space does not allow for the explanation or identification of these promises, but they include
the promises made in passages such as Rom 8:28-29; 1 Pet 1:3-9; Rom 8:1-2; Eph 2:4-10.

no hidden truth, nothing besides the all-sufficient resources that we find in Christ exists that can change the human heart."[10]

God has not, however, simply left believers alone with their Bibles to fend for themselves amidst the multitude of problems that constantly barrage the soul. He has lovingly provided for his body other Christians in the local church, as one of the primary means by which he plans to minister the sufficient truth of himself to the depths of hearts.

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**The Gospel is Ministered Through
the Community of Believers:
Ephesians 4:11-16**

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In Ephesians 4, Paul provides an explanation of how God has designed the church to work and the part each believer plays in ministering to one another. He elucidates this concept using one of his favorite analogies, that of the body.[11]

> And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:11-16)[12]

God has provided the church with certain people whom he has given to the church for the training and equipping of the body as a whole. Of those mentioned in the five-fold list above, the first two (apostles and prophets) refer to roles that existed solely

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[10]Wayne Mack, "The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling," *MSJ* 9, no. 1 (1988): 66.

[11]See Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-31.

[12]This passage, while uniquely important, is wrought with theological debate at almost every turn. While the scope of this project does not allow for the in-depth discussion that each of those questions would require, it is important to acknowledge the key disagreements, as one seeks to apply the truth Paul is communicating to life and ministry.

in the apostolic age,[13] while the roles of evangelists, pastors, and teachers are still

indispensable for the church today.[14]  The reason these roles are indispensable is because

of their function within the body of Christ.  Evangelists, pastors, and teachers have the

unique responsibility of equipping and training the other parts of the body so that they

may be effective in mutually building one another up towards maturity in Christ.

There is absolute consensus among leading modern commentators that one of

the primary roles of evangelists, pastors and teachers is to equip the body of Christ.

There is disagreement, however, regarding whether Ephesians 4:12 states that they are to

"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body"[15] or rather that they

are to "equip the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body."[16]  Given the

larger context of this passage (Eph 4:7, 16), the syntactical evidence of the prepositional

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[13]One of the strongest arguments for the temporary nature of the apostles and prophets in the book of Ephesians is the earlier mentioning of their existence in the book, as well as their unique function. As F. F. Bruce writes, "The first two gifts are 'apostles' and 'prophets,' both these terms [are] to be understood in the sense which they bear in Eph. 2.20 and 3.5.  In our note on Eph 2.20 it was suggested that the 'foundation of the apostles and prophets' there is a reference to the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation, who formed the Lord's foundation-gifts to His Church . . . . In the churches of the first generation the apostles and prophets discharged a unique role, which in some essential features has been taken over by the canonical writings of the New Testament" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984], 84-85).

[14]There is much discussion regarding the identification of pastors and teachers as either one and the same, or two separate "gifts" from God.  While the answer to that question does not drastically affect the point of the argument made in this paper, Klyne Snodgrass provides helpful insight that can shape how one understands those whom God has given the church in these capacities: "The titles listed here do not necessarily mean the same in the first century as they do today, particularly 'evangelists' and 'pastors.'  In fact, although the titles refer to roles that proclaim the faith, the actual definition of the titles is difficult.  Particularly in Paul's letters the evidence is limited.  Moreover, the categories are not mutually exclusive" (Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 203).

[15]See argument in Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 301-04.

[16]See argument in T. David Gordon, "'Equipping' Ministry in Ephesians 4?" *JETS* 37, no. 1 (1994): 70-79.

change from the first phrase to the second two,[17] and the larger focus in the book of Ephesians on the unity and holistic nature of Christ's blessings (Eph 1:3-19; 3:20), the former translation ought to be preferred. However, even if the latter translation is favored, there is little, if any, change in the understanding of the role of each and every believer in one another's lives. For, the consensus regarding "equipping" remains, and the mutual ministry of each believer is strongly affirmed prior to this passage as well as at its conclusion:

> But grace was given to *each one of us* according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph 4:7)[18]

> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow *so that it builds itself up in love.* (Eph 4:15-16)[19]

Consequently, it is to these two final verses that one ought to turn in order to best understand the nature of the mutual personal ministry of all believers, and how God desires for that ministry to take place.

God designed his body to "build itself up in love" that "the whole body . . . makes the body grow." The growth that Paul is referring to is growth in Christ-likeness (v. 15), and this kind of growth comes through knowing Christ and applying the truth of the gospel (as established in the discussion of 2 Pet 1:3-4). As Christians, then, all are called to help one another grow in Christ-likeness by pointing one another to Christ through his Word and reminding one another of the truth of the gospel in the midst of the multitude of circumstances and situations that people experience.

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[17]As O'Brien writes, "The prepositional change is not finally decisive: syntactically the three phrases could be dependent on the verb 'he gave.' But if there is a movement from the discussion of the work of the ministers (v.11) to that of all God's people between v. 12a and v. 12bc, as we contend, then the change in preposition confirms that movement" (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 302).

[18]Emphasis added.

[19]Emphasis added.

Paul describes this kind of ministry simply as "speaking the truth in love." The beauty and power of this phrase is twofold. First, God's expectation for mutual personal ministry is powerfully communicated in the pairing of "truth" and "love" together. Without either of these two necessary components, mutual personal ministry fails to be truly biblical and ceases to build the body up as it was designed to do. As Andrew Lincoln states so well,

> The whole clause, 'speaking the truth in love,' should be understood as the means of the Church's growth. The association of truth and love in this clause is a significant one. Any claim to loyalty to truth which results in lack of love to those perceived to be disloyal stands as much condemned as any claim to all-embracing love which is indifferent to truth . . . . Ultimately, at the heart of the proclamation of the truth is love, and a life of love is the embodiment of truth.[20]

The second significant aspect of this phrase is found in the Greek word ἀληθεύω which is translated, "speaking the truth." The word, translated literally, simply means "truthing," and while "speaking the truth" is probably the best translation given the context (i.e., Paul's concern regarding "winds of doctrine" and "deceitful schemes"), there was probably a richer understanding intended. In addition to speaking the truth, "truthing" also carried with it a sense of living a truthful, righteous, and upright life that demonstrated the truth that was being spoken.[21] Thus, mutual personal ministry ought to exist fundamentally in lovingly speaking the truth, but also in lovingly serving, caring, and knowing others as manifestations of biblical truth.

There is no doubt that evangelists, pastors, and teachers are called to minister the gospel to those in the church through preaching, teaching, and personal relationships.[22] However, one of their primary responsibilities (as elucidated in this

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[20]Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 260.

[21]Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of Ephesians* (Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1970), 83.

[22]See 1 Pet 5:1-4; Heb 13:7-17; 1 Thess 2:1-12.

passage) is also to equip and train the body at large so that the members of the body might mutually minister to one another by "speaking the truth in love." God desires for the gospel and the Word of God to be ministered through the entire community of believers (in love). And so, it is imperative that evangelists, pastors and teachers work to equip the body of Christ to that end.

> While it is true that some have a special responsibility to teach and preach, Paul stresses that every Christian is responsible to build up the church. We have all received grace for ministry and must live worthy of that calling. We are all expected to work to strengthen the church, and only as each person fulfills his or her calling is the church truly strong.[23]

This mutual personal ministry is, therefore, the primary practical means God has provided for addressing the problems in living that all Christians experience. As Paul Tripp writes, "Many of us would be relieved if God had placed our sanctification in the hands of trained and paid professionals, but that simply is not the biblical model."[24] Whether the problems are a result of suffering, personal sin, or both, the doubting heart of the believer would prefer the help of a culturally defined "professional" to minister to them in the midst of pain and need. However, the model that God has created in his church does not deny the unique gifting and equipping of certain members, but places the emphasis on the "'every person, every day' ministry lifestyle."[25] And, one can have confidence in God's plan, for just as he did not leave his people alone with their Bible to fend for themselves, he also did not leave them alone and helpless in their ministry with one another. He has caused his very Spirit to dwell inside all believers, empowering those who disciple and counsel as well as those to whom they minister.

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[23]Snodgrass, *Ephesians,* 212.

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

[25]Ibid.

### The Ministry of the Gospel is Empowered by the Work
### of the Spirit: John 14:26 / Galatians 5:22-25

The call for all Christians to minister the gospel of Christ to one another can be an overwhelming assignment. People are incredibly complex beings, and the truth contained in Scripture can seem overwhelming in magnitude. Thankfully, God has not left believers alone in their ministry to one another. Not only has he called Christians to mutual ministry, but he has also empowered both them and those they minister to through the Holy Spirit that dwells in all believers.

The Spirit is fundamental to mutual personal ministry among believers. For example, he inspired the very Scriptures that are the source of any knowledge of Christ (2 Pet 1:21). He illuminates the truth of Scripture to the hearts and minds of his children (1 Cor 2:6-16). He gifts every Christian in unique ways to bless and build up the church (1 Cor 12:12-26). He intercedes on the behalf of every believer before the Father (Rom 8:26-27).

In addition, the Spirit empowers all Christians to become more like Christ, sanctifying them by the truth of the gospel as it continues to take root in their hearts. This specific role of the Spirit will be the focus of this section, for it is crucial when discussing mutual personal ministry to be reminded of the spiritual reality and empowerment that lies at the core of all efforts to minister to one another as Christians. All of the equipping in the world cannot empower a Christian to bring about change in another's life or heart. All true spiritual change comes as a result of the work of the Spirit, in concert with one's willful actions. Without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, even a Christian's most valiant and disciplined efforts would be powerless to bring about true heart change.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them alone after his death, but that he would send them a helper who would be an even better teacher than he was (John 16:7-15). In preparing his disciples for his departure Jesus told them, "But the

Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Here it can be seen that one of the primary functions of the Spirit in the life of a believer is that of teacher.[26] While Jesus made this promise specifically to the apostles, there is an application regarding the nature of the Spirit and his ministry in the lives of all Christians that ought to be observed as well.[27] The Spirit is the one who teaches the truth of the gospel and the truth regarding who Christ is to the hearts of believers, and he is also the one who reminds them of these truths.

In addition, what Jesus is referring to when he says that the Spirit will teach the apostles "all things" ought to be considered. D. A. Carson provides a helpful comment,

> [The focus on Christ] begins to be clear when we ask what 'all things' means: the Holy Spirit will teach the disciples 'all things.' This cannot mean all things without exception. The Holy Spirit is not particularly concerned to impart to the disciples of Jesus an exhaustive knowledge of nuclear physics, astronomy, cell biology, the literature of Tanganyika, or the mating habits of the porcupine.[28]

While Jesus is, obviously, not referring to all exhaustive knowledge in this promise, he *is* referring to all of the things that believers need to know in order to know him, remember him, and live a life for him. The Spirit first reminded the apostles of the truth of Christ so they could record that truth in the pages of the New Testament. And, now, the Spirit reminds all believers of the truth recorded in the New Testament by teaching and applying it to their hearts as they study and meditate upon it. In any situation or circumstance, through predictable and confusing moments of life, the Spirit of God dwells in believers to teach them "all things" they need to know.[29]

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[26]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 583.

[27]B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1924), 208; D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 74.

[28]Carson, *The Farewell Discourse,* 71.

[29]While the correlation may have not been made by Peter as he wrote his second epistle, because of (1) the similarity of subject matter, (2) the nature of the Spirit's ministry to teach spiritual truths,

Not only does the Spirit teach believers the truth they need to know, but he also produces the changes of heart and actions that come as a result of knowing that truth. In the practice of mutual personal ministry it is tempting to forget that any true change in heart or behavior only comes as a result of the work of the Spirit through the willful actions of the believer. One might be tempted to think that simply knowing the right truth and saying it the right way will automatically produce the change desired. However, change is a spiritual issue and one that can only be brought about through the empowering work of the Spirit. In Galatians, the apostle Paul asserts as much when he identifies the key virtues of the Christian life as "fruit of the Spirit."

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)

The nine virtues listed here (and other "such things") are said to be the "fruit of the Spirit," or, in other words, manifestations of the work of the Spirit in the believer's life. In fact, these virtues are, more specifically, manifestations of Christ-likeness in the life of the believers brought about by the work of the Spirit.[30] Ronald Fung describes the singular focus on Christ this way,

> Here the singular 'harvest' shows that the nine graces mentioned are not, so to say, different jewels; rather, they are different facets of the same jewel which cohere and show forth their luster simultaneously – when the Spirit is truly at work in the believer's life.[31]

and (3) the sending of the Spirit to the church by Christ, it ought to be observed that the "all things" taught by the Spirit can be equated with the "all things" that Christ has given believers "for life and godliness" in 2 Peter. On this basis, it can be affirmed that both the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of all other spiritual truth are empowered by the work of the Spirit and sufficient for all problems in living.

[30]Richard Longenecker provides a helpful clarification at this point: "Though indeed the virtues listed [in Gal 5:22-25] are given as gifts by God through the Spirit, one must not 'unpack' the metaphor of 'fruit' in such a manner as to stress only the given quality of the virtues listed, implying an ethical passivity on the Christian's part. For as the exhortations throughout this entire section suggest, combined with the givenness of these virtues by God is the believer's active involvement in expressing them in his or her own lifestyle" (Richard Longenecker, *Galatians,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990], 259-60).

[31]Ronald Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 262.

The "jewel" to which Fung refers is the image of Christ that is continually and progressively being produced in the life of the Christian (2 Cor 3:18). This image is the result that all mutual personal ministry has as its goal. Therefore, it can be seen that the goal of all mutual personal ministry can only be ultimately brought about through dependence on the ongoing work of the Spirit.

Acknowledging the empowering work of the Spirit in the believer's life is indispensable to understanding how Christians ought to minister the gospel to one another. Consequently, this fundamental understanding ought to be seen applied in mutual personal ministry in at least three ways. First, Christians ought to minister the gospel with confidence because it is not only their words and actions at work in the situation, but the Spirit of God is at work to bring about progressive sanctification in the life of the one they are ministering to. Second, any kind of ministry of the gospel ought to be rooted and grounded in prayer, for it is not effective efforts or eloquent speech that will ultimately bring about change in another's life, but it is the work of the Spirit of God producing fruit in the life of the believer. And, finally, Christians ought to exhort one another boldly knowing that the Spirit has empowered all believers to obey the various commands that are given throughout Scripture. The Spirit empowers and works through the will of Christians as they choose to obey Christ, and so it is imperative that Christians continue to echo the exhortation of Paul to "walk by the Spirit."[32]

While many may confess that the knowledge of the gospel and person of Christ, ministered through the body of Christ, and empowered by the Spirit are sufficient for all problems in living, they still may not understand how that knowledge directly applies to the particular problem in living they, or someone close to them, is struggling

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[32]Again, Longenecker provides an insightful comment on this point: "That he exhorts believers to do what it is the work of the Spirit to produce (cf. vv 22-23) is typical of Paul's understanding of Christian ethics, for Paul never views the ethical activity of the believer apart from the Spirit's work nor the Spirit's ethical direction and enablement apart from the believer's active expression of his or her faith." (Longenecker, *Galatians*, 266).

with. All problems in living involve suffering, in one way or another, from the impact of living in a fallen world among sinful people. All problems in living also involve the sin of the one who is experiencing them, either as a direct cause or as a response to the suffering. The pages of Scripture are replete with examples of how knowledge of Christ ministers to those who are experiencing a wide variety of problems in living, both as sufferers and sinners. One particularly poignant passage that provides a picture of how the gospel and person of Christ minister to Christians in the midst of suffering is found in the beginning of 1 Peter.

**The Ministry of the Gospel Amidst**
**Believers as They Suffer:**
**1 Peter 1:3-7**

In the midst of a fallen world among fallen people, Christians (as all people) experience a multitude of different kinds of suffering and grief. Consequently, many problems in living are brought about by, intensified by, and wrapped up in the context of suffering. While space does not allow for a full theology of suffering here, in the beginning of Peter's first epistle one finds a foundational passage regarding suffering and how the truth of the Gospel and person of Christ minister to believers as they suffer.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:3-7)

The focus of this discussion will be on verses 6-7 in this passage, however the immediate context is necessary to grasp the content to which these verses refer. In verses 3-5 Peter provides a doxology praising God for his goodness and faithfulness working through the implications of the gospel message. As a result of faith in Christ believers have been given new life, an eternal inheritance, and eternal protection. As Thomas

Schreiner writes,

> The reason God is to be praised is now explained – 'he has given us new birth'. . . . The focus therefore is on God's initiative in producing new life. No one takes any credit for being born . . . . Believers deserve judgment and wrath, but God is a God of mercy and grace, bestowing life upon those who are opposed to him.[33]

This new birth, or regeneration, is at the heart of how God desires believers to view suffering. Those that have trusted in Christ as their savior and accepted his sacrifice on the cross as the payment for their sin have been made spiritually alive, and given an eternal hope and eternal inheritance. And it is in reference to all that God has done for believers through Christ that Peter writes, "In this you rejoice." As Peter Davids reflects,

> This joy is based on the knowledge that Christ has come (Luke 10:21; John 8:56; Acts 2:26), that God has revealed his saving grace to them (Acts 16:24), and that they will take part in the consummated joy of God's glory and salvation at the approaching end of the age (Jude 24; Rev 19:7).[34]

In other words, joy, in the midst of suffering, flows from the good news announced, inaugurated, established, and guaranteed by Christ. Or, in short, joy flows from the gospel, even in the midst of suffering.

The joy of which Peter speaks is not a hilarious happiness, but an underlying, deep seated and peaceful contentedness in light of eternal hope that cannot be swayed by the storms of life.[35] Thus Peter applies the impact of this joy directly to circumstances of suffering.[36] He writes, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Pet 1:6).

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[33]Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 60-61.

[34]Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 55.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Disagreement exists regarding whether the verb translated here "rejoice" should be translated as a present indicative, a present indicative with a future sense, or a present imperative. However, understanding the verb in light of the preceding context (vv. 3-5), as well as in the context of the present indicative verb translated "love" in v. 8 ought to lead one to prefer understanding "rejoice" as a present indicative, maintaining its present sense. See Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 66; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 60-61.

Here, Peter instructs believers as to how the gospel applies to them in the midst of suffering. As has been demonstrated, he first points back to the effects of the gospel as a source of ultimate joy even in the midst of suffering. Second, he identifies the duration of suffering as "for a little while." Peter does not mean to refer only to brief trials or those that quickly go away, but instead is referring to the eternal perspective that causes even the greatest and longest lasting trials to be seen as temporary in light of the eternal promises of God. Third, Peter qualifies his reference to suffering by inserting the phrase, "if necessary." Here the reader catches a glimpse of God's sovereign purposes that are discussed in depth in verse 7.

Suffering (to endure pain, distress, loss, or damage) is an inevitable reality in this fallen world. However, the child of God has the ability to endure suffering knowing that no amount of discomfort, persecution, sickness, or pain can take away the eternal hope they have been given in Christ. And, in fact, it is these very sources of grief that God desires to use to increase the ultimate joy, exultation, and Christ-likeness of those whom he loves. Continuing his thought, Peter writes that Christians suffer ". . . so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:7).

God has sovereign purposes for the suffering of his children, and he uses their suffering to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith and purify them from the vestiges of sin in their hearts (cf. Jas 1:2-4). Suffering demonstrates the faith (or lack thereof) of God's people, and it is through painful circumstances that God sanctifies his children, like gold that is purified through the smelter's fire. Because of the pain involved, the Christian is tempted to believe that suffering does damage to one's heart; however, here it can be seen that the exact opposite is true.

> For just as fire does no harm to the gold, devours it not, neither diminishes it, but only serves it, for it takes from it all dross so that it becomes indeed pure and genuine, just so does the fire and heat of persecution and of all opposition indeed

grieve us and cause the old Adam pain beyond measure, so that those exercised thereby become sad and for a time impatient; yet their faith will thereby become pure and genuine, like refined gold or silver.[37]

Suffering is one of the primary contexts in which God desires to grow, mature, and sanctify his children. And that progressive sanctification is *also* a source of great joy, for it will be the basis upon which the believer will be given honor, praise, and glory when he or she stands before Christ upon his return. God will, of course, receive glory for his work in the lives of his children, but Peter here is speaking specifically of the glory and honor given to Christians when their lives are laid before the Creator and they hear "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:23).[38]

Therefore, the foundational applications of the gospel found in this passage to believers as they suffer are two-fold. First, in the midst of suffering, Christians ought to be able to rejoice in the eternal benefits of the gospel. God has saved believers, caused them to be born again, reserved an eternal inheritance for them in heaven, and is protecting them so that they may persevere until the day that they may receive that inheritance in full. In the midst of even the gravest circumstances on earth, the future hope that Christians are provided in Christ ministers to their hearts and instills in them a joy that cannot be shaken.

Second, in the midst of suffering, Christians ought to be able to rejoice in the temporal benefits of the gospel. God did not simply save his children from their sin and then leave them alone until they get to heaven. As they continue to live on earth, God is continually remaking their lives and hearts into the glorious image of his Son. One of the primary means God uses for this growth is suffering. Not only do Christians have hope *beyond* suffering, but they have hope *in* their suffering as well. Suffering is not meaningless or arbitrary. God allows, directs, and uses the suffering in one's life for that

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[37]Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1990), 45.

[38]Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude,* 42.

person's ultimate good and his ultimate glory. While man is oftentimes not privy to all of the purposes of his specific circumstances, Peter tells his hearers that they can trust God because he is faithful to use their circumstances (whether they understand how or not), and because he has already proven himself overwhelmingly faithful through the sacrifice and resurrection of his Son and the subsequent regeneration of their hearts through the ministry of the Spirit.

The gospel radically changes how the Christian understands suffering, and it is the basis for all mutual personal ministry to others when problems in living involve suffering, as they almost always do. However, problems in living do not, of course, only stem from suffering and living in a fallen world amidst sinful people. Problems in living inevitably involve personal sin as well, which the gospel is also sufficient to address, as Paul demonstrates in his letter to the Colossians.

## The Ministry of the Gospel Amidst Believers as They Sin: Colossians 3:1-14

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.
Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Col 3:1-14)

In this passage, Paul demonstrates how the gospel addresses problems in living that are caused by one's own sinful heart and actions. Here it can be seen that the gospel

is not only foundational to personal ministry in dealing with the sin and rebellion of unbelievers who need to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, but that it is also foundational in addressing the ongoing sin in the lives of believers. Furthermore, this passage provides a practical explanation of how the reality of the gospel is lived out among those who have been fundamentally changed by it.

Flowing from the first two chapters of the book, Paul begins this passage by providing the foundational implications of the gospel that motivate and empower believers to address the indwelling sin in their lives: regeneration, union with Christ, and glory at Christ's return. Here he continues the thought he had introduced in 2:12-13: "You were also raised with [Christ] through faith in the powerful working of God . . . God made [you] alive together with him, having forgiven us all of our trespasses" (Col 2:12-13).[39] He then introduces the present passage, writing, "If then you have been raised with Christ" (Col 3:1). The "if" translated here carries with it an assumed positive sense and can best be understood as "since" based on both the preceding and following context.[40] Therefore, Paul's instruction to "seek the things that are above," and all of the subsequent instructions contained in this passage, naturally flow as a result of the regeneration that has taken place as the believer has been "made alive" and "raised with Christ."

This regenerative union, however, is not the only implication of the believer's union with Christ mentioned in this passage. Paul also states that believers ought to be fixing their attention on heavenly things because "you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."[41] The believer is unified with Christ both in his death and in his

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[39]William Hendricksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon,* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 139.

[40]Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 159.

[41]Ibid., 164-65.

resurrection.  He is unified with Christ in his death in that he is dead to the "old self" and

is no longer enslaved to his former manner of life.  Similarly, he is unified with Christ in

his resurrection in that he has now been made alive in the image of the "new self," is

being progressively sanctified into the image of Christ, and will be glorified with him

upon his return.

It is this glorification that is the third implication of the gospel Paul mentions

in this opening passage.  Here he addresses not only the current reality that the believer

has both died with Christ and been raised with him, but also the future reality of the

consummation of that death and resurrection before the judgment seat of Christ.[42]  As P.

T. O'Brien writes,

> But the Colossians are exhorted to think on the things of heaven not only
> because they died with Christ to the old order, but also (καὶ) because they have been
> raised with him and participate in his resurrection life . . . . Here at Colossians 3:3, 4
> both present and future aspects are linked: at verse 3 the life . . . is already present,
> bound up with Christ, though in a hidden way . . . at verse 4 the future note is struck
> when it is asserted that this life . . . will be manifested for what it really is at the
> Second Coming.[43]

It is on the basis of these three gospel implications that Paul seeks to motivate

the moral life and actions of the Colossians.  Paul's gospel imperatives, as they always

do, stem from gospel indicatives regarding who God has made his children to be. [44]  As F.

F. Bruce comments,

> What God has done for his people in Christ is the grand argument and
> incentive for Christian living.  The apostolic teaching or *didache* may be
> distinguished from the preaching or *kerygma*, but it is founded on the preaching –
> and in any case the distinction between the two should not be pressed too sharply.
> Whatever affinities may be traced between Paul's ethical exhortations and those of

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[42]The key implications of the gospel listed here in Colossians (namely regeneration and glorification) ought to be familiar as they are the same as the those identified previously in the brief study of 1 Peter 1:3-7.  This similarity ought to be noted, for in them it can be seen that the same fundamental effects of the gospel are at the core of mutual personal ministry whether one is ministering to another amidst suffering or sin, or as is usually the case, both.  Regardless of the immediate cause of one's problems in living, the gospel, and the same gospel implications, are always at the heart of effective personal ministry.

[43]O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 165.

[44]Cf. Eph 4:1-3, 25; Rom 12:1-2.

contemporary moralists, their whole emphasis in Paul's writings depends on their arising directly out of the work of Christ. It is because believers have died with Christ and been raised to new life with him that their conduct is henceforth to be different.[45]

It is from the foundation of these indicative truths that Paul then provides specific imperative instructions: negatively, regarding those actions that are of the "old self," and positively, regarding those actions that are of the "new self." He begins by instructing the Colossians to "put to death . . . what is earthly in you" (Col 3:5a). Paul then provides a list of traits he labels "earthly" so as to give the Colossians a practical understanding of the types of actions, thoughts, and motives that are vestiges of the "old self" and ought to be identified, rejected, and avoided.[46]

Interestingly, Paul ends his list of actions that ought to be "put to death" with a mirrored indicative, writing, "seeing that you have put off the old self." It is this continual alternation between indicatives and imperatives that reminds his readers of the inseparable link between the two.[47] And it is the fact that imperatives are rooted in indicatives that provides the empowerment the believer needs to have victory over the seemingly overwhelming pull of the "old self." As N. T. Wright comments,

> But is this ethical appeal realistic? Paul answers with a strong affirmative, undergirding ethics with theology. Though it may not always feel like it, those who

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[45]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 134.

[46]Paul's focus, not only on outward actions but on the heart motives that those actions flow from, is evident here as his list moves from external sin (sexual immorality) to internal sin (covetousness). As F. F. Bruce writes, "In moving from the outward manifestations of sin to the cravings of the heart – from improper acts to their inner springs – Paul proceeds in the manner of our Lord, who in the Sermon on the Mount traces murder back to the angry thought, and adultery to the lustful glance (Matt 5:21-22)" (ibid., 142).

[47]Supporting the identification of these participles as indicatives, O'Brien writes, "Many exegetes consider that the two aorist participles ἀπεκδυσάμενοι ('having put off,' v 9) and ἐνδυσάμενοι ('having put on,' v 10) are to be understood in an imperatival sense . . . . However, the alternative view of treating the two verbs as true participles which describe the past event, in which the readers have already put off the old nature and put on the new, as the basis for the abandonment of evil ways, is preferable since it is more in keeping with Paul's teaching elsewhere in Colossians" (O'Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 188-89. See also Hendricksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, 149).

have joined the family of Christ have become different people. They have 'taken off' the old solidarity, the old humanity, like a shabby set of clothes.[48]

Conversely, Paul then instructs the Colossians in the types of Christ-like actions that the gospel produces in believers. He provides a second list that provides a practical gauge for the types of actions that ought to characterize one who has already truly "put on the new self" (v. 10). "His . . . purpose was to remind the Colossians that their lives should measure up to their profession. Let them become in practice what they already were by divine calling and design."[49] In short, Paul was calling the Colossians (and all believers) to become what they are.

At the climax of his instruction, Paul writes, "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). At the heart of Christ-likeness is the virtue of love, which encompasses both God's relationship with his children (1 John 4:9-10) and his call upon their relationships with him and others (Matt 22:35-40). Love is the virtue that makes all of the other "fruits" produced by the "new self" possible, and it binds all of them together.[50] Therefore, as Christians seek to "put off" the "old self" and "put on" the "new self," the key component of that gospel-motivated process will be doing away with self-love and pursuing love of both God and others.

As is laid out so powerfully throughout this passage, the ability to love God and others in this way, and to subsequently "put off" the thoughts, motives, and actions of

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[48]N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon,* The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 138.

[49]Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians: The Church's Lord and The Christian's Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 120.

[50]Reflecting on the unique nature of "love" as the key virtue, Wright comments, "The frequent parallels in secular literature to the idea of a supreme virtue acting as the unifying principle for the others means that NIV's interpretation is probably to be preferred, indicting a specifically Christian viewpoint over against other systems of ethics. 'Love' never has this supreme position in other systems, not even (for instance) in the admirable list of virtues found in the Qumran *Community Rule.* The other virtues, pursued without love, become distorted and unbalanced" (Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 143).

the old way of living while "putting on" the thoughts, motives, and actions of Christ, is rooted in the understanding of the indicatives of gospel truth. The gospel ministers to believers in the midst of their sin by reminding them of who they are, that they have been made spiritually alive through their union with Christ, that they have been freed from their enslavement to sin through their union with Christ, and that they will be glorified with Christ when he returns. This ought to provide the foundation for all mutual personal ministry among believers as they sin. Imperatives alone are not enough. Trite reminders of the past implications of the gospel are not enough. But, gospel imperatives directly tied to gospel indicatives remind the Christian who they are, what they have been called to, and how they are empowered to become who they are.

**Conclusion**

The gospel and person of Christ, ministered through the body of Christ and empowered by the Spirit are sufficient to address all problems in living whether they involve personal suffering, personal sin, or (as is inevitably the case) both. These five passages provide a representative understanding of the teaching of all of Scripture regarding how God desires his children to address problems in living when they experience them. It is upon the foundation of these passages that a practical understanding will be developed regarding how the gospel and person of Christ address the three specific problems in living identified for this project. This will be done by incorporating and building upon the practical insights of the numerous biblical pastoral theologians who have insightfully written on these issues, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Studying and meditating on these passages ought to give every Christian great hope regardless of the problems in living they are experiencing. For, God promises that he is sufficient to address the struggle, regardless of its size or duration. God is sufficient, and in Christ the believer has hope, a hope that shines light in the darkest

moments of suffering, and a hope that breaks the chains of the most entangling sin.

CHAPTER 3

EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF
VARIOUS PROFESSIONALS TO A
BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF PROBLEMS IN LIVING

Many different classes of professionals have sought to contribute to an

accurate understanding of people and their problems.  As a result, Christians have

received many mixed messages regarding how they ought to conceptualize and

understand their problems in living.  Three of the most influential groups of professionals

upon the experience and understanding of Christians in West Los Angeles (and most

parts of the western world) are biblical pastoral theologians, integrative Christian

psychologists, and secular psychiatrists.  This chapter will seek to provide a limited

biblical summary and evaluation of these three perspectives.

**Summarizing the Contributions of Biblical**
**Pastoral Theologians**

Over the past few centuries, many biblical pastoral theologians have reflected

and written on the nature of humanity and its problems.[1]  In the last half-century, a

resurgence of such pastoral studies and insight has taken the form of the biblical

counseling movement.  Space and the nature of this project do not allow for a full

description or evaluation of the contributions of such pastoral theologians here, for they

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[1]Examples include Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, *The Pactical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1846); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper Collins, 1954); John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004).

have been well documented elsewhere in the biblical counseling world.[2]  However, a

brief summary of some of their key contributions should be given in order to demonstrate

how biblical pastoral theologians have helped the church develop a more biblically

accurate understanding of people and their problems.

**Contributions to a Biblical**
**Understanding of Suffering**

    **The complexity of suffering.**  While people often look for simple

explanations and quick fixes for the suffering humans experience,[3] many pastoral

theologians have highlighted a biblical understanding of suffering by strongly affirming

its complexity.  In identifying the many different causes of suffering, Ed Welch describes

a worldview that is deeply biblical and largely unknown to those outside the Christian

community.  He writes,

> Turn Scripture's gaze, for example, to the question of what causes depression
> (suffering, trials).  Its answers shun the simplistic and point to at least five possible
> causes.  *Other people* are one cause of hardship-depression. . . . *We* too are a cause
> of suffering. . . . *Our bodies* are another obvious cause of suffering. . . . *Satan* is a
> fourth cause of human suffering. . . . *God* himself is a cause of suffering.[4]

He goes on later in the same chapter to explain why the recognition of suffering's

complexity does not result in hopelessness.

> The reason Scripture doesn't give clear guidelines for assigning responsibility
> is that it is not essential for us to know precise causes. . . . We might uncover some

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   [2]Summaries of the contributions of those in the biblical counseling movement can be found in:
David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling
Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008); Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling
Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012).

   [3]Examples include biological theories and medications (as will be detailed below), simplistic
sin-cause theories (e.g., Job's counselors, Job 4-18), Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" theory (A. H.
Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psy Rev* 40 [1946]: 370-76), and many Christian "self-help"
theories (e.g., Kevin Leman, *Have a New Kid by Friday* [Grand Rapids: Revell, 2008]; Henry Cloud and
John Townsend, *Boundaries* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992]).

   [4]Edward T. Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press,
2004), 39-40. Emphasis in the original.

of the reasons for our suffering but we might never find them all.  There is a mystery in suffering.[5]

This is a perspective that is unrecognized in the vast majority of counseling settings. People tend to look for simplistic explanations for suffering, and consequently, simplistic solutions to it.[6]

**The purpose of suffering.**  One of the most culturally confrontational contributions of biblical pastoral theologians is the recognition that suffering is not the ultimate evil, but that it is redeemable by a sovereign God who allows it for the ultimate good of his children.  This is a perspective that is highlighted throughout the New Testament[7] and is made explicitly clear in the first chapter of the book of James.  As Tim Lane and Paul Tripp comment, "Without the trials we so dislike, James says we would remain immature, incomplete, and deficient as Christians.  Trials help us!  Through them we become more mature and more complete, until finally we lack nothing!"[8]  They go on to explain exactly how trials help by describing how they bring about their sanctifying effect.

> James says that the harvest depends on what is happening inside a person.  If the trial leads to temptation and sin, it is because the person has been "dragged away and enticed" by the "evil desires" of his own heart.  It is very humbling and important to admit that trials do not cause you to sin.  God does not tempt you to sin by sending trials your way.  If we respond sinfully to the trials he sends, it is not because we have been forced to sin, but because our hearts have chosen to do so.[9]

Here it can be seen that God uses suffering to expose the "evil desires" in the believer's heart so that he may set his or her desires and affections chiefly upon himself by

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[5]Ibid., 43.

[6]See examples above.

[7]Cf. Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 4:12-13; Rom 5:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7.

[8]Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 101.

[9]Ibid., 102.

reminding him or her of the grace available through the gospel.  From this perspective a believer can begin to understand the biblically defined relationship between suffering and sin, and how the gospel offers hope in the midst of both.

**Contributions to a Biblical
Understanding of Sin**

   **The relationship between sin and suffering.**  Biblical pastoral theologians are clear in their assertions that sin is the cause of problems in living.  However, defining "sin" in this instance is of the utmost importance.  As was asserted by Ed Welch in the previous section, problems in living come from all sorts of causes including being sinned against, Satan, living in a fallen world, and one's own sinful thoughts and actions.  These are all forms of "sin" that contribute to one's problems in living.  As Jay Adams clarifies, "While all human misery – disability, sickness, etc. – does go back to Adam's sin . . . that is not the same as saying that a *quid pro quo* relationship between each counselee's misery and his own personal sins exists."[10]

   But, while all suffering is not caused by direct personal sin, all suffering *does* provide an opportunity for direct personal sin both in action and in heart.  It is here that the relationship between suffering and sin has been so helpfully clarified by biblical pastoral theologians.  When one sins (in thought or deed) in response to suffering, the suffering is not the cause of the sin, but simply the most proximate occasion for it.  Lane and Tripp explain,

> We must make the important distinction between the occasion for sin and the ultimate cause of sin.  This will determine what you think the solution to your problem will be.  It will also determine who will receive the glory . . . you or Christ!  If your problem is ultimately outside you, Christ is not needed.  The opportunity to experience the love, grace, and power of Christ is replaced by something else.[11]

This relational distinction is fundamental to a biblical theology of sin and suffering and

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   [10]Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 140.

   [11]Lane and Tripp, *How People Change,* 133.

has been greatly clarified by biblical pastoral theologians.

**The depth of sin in idolatry and self-supremacy.**  The concept of idolatry is one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of humanity and its problems that biblical pastoral theologians have made over the past two decades.  This biblical concept has been repeated over and over in many different contexts in recent years.[12]  The concept of idolatry has provided a metaphor that has deepened many Christians' understanding of the dynamics of sin.  As Jesus first asserted in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:21-30), sin is an internal reality before it is ever an external reality.  David Powlison, who popularized this metaphor with his article "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," describes idolatry this way: "In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question. . . . The alternative to Jesus, the swarm of alternatives, whether approached through the lens of flesh, world, or the Evil One, is idolatry."[13]

While this metaphor helped to deepen the biblical conceptualization of sin, it has also been clarified and enhanced in the years since in order to demonstrate that this "lordship question" is not, most fundamentally, a battle between Christ and one's others desires, but instead, most foundationally, a battle between Christ and oneself.  Heath Lambert explains,

> Idols actually come at the end of a process that has its genesis in this evil disposition of the heart being discussed. The sinful, self-exalting heart produces lusts or evil desires . . . . These desires and lusts grow out of a heart that sees itself as supreme and as the best and sole determiner of what is best. . . . All of the lusts

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[12]Examples include Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009); G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001).

[13]David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," *JBC* 13:2 (1995): 35.

and evil desires that the Bible mentions are a secondary problem flowing out of the primary problem which is a heart that sees itself as supreme.[14]

This self-supremacy is at the core of the biblical conception of sin.  And this biblical conception of sin is a perspective that has been highlighted and greatly clarified by biblical pastoral theologians.

**Contributions to a Biblical**
**Understanding of Change**

       **Change requires correctly understanding gospel-indicatives.**  Most theories regarding human change are primarily pragmatic in nature.[15]  Psychologists study a host of different "interventions" attempting to discover which one produces change most often.  However, biblical pastoral theologians understand the scriptural truth that change is not fundamentally external in nature, but internal.  Change must first happen in one's heart if true external life change is ever to be seen.  And heart change only takes place through the application of the gospel by the power of the Spirit of God.

       Many biblical pastoral theologians, especially in recent years, have helped to clarify the fact that Spirit-empowered change only takes place as the gospel (and its implications in the life of the believer) is further and further applied.  As Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis Johnson write, "The truth of the gospel – that we are 'in' him – isn't meant only for those who are beginning the Christian life.  It is meant for all of us *every day*."[16]  Out of this conviction flows the importance of understanding the "indicative" truths regarding who God has made his children to be in Christ.

       All obedience and personal change is to flow out of a believer as a response to

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[14]Heath Lambert, "The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 173.

[15]Examples include cognitive-behavioral therapy, behavioral therapy, alcoholics anonymous, psychotropic medications, etc.

[16]Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson, *Counsel from the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 115. Emphasis in the original.

the immeasurable love of Christ and the new identity they have in him. These indicative truths (that believers are justified, adopted, sanctified, forgiven, etc.) ought to be the motivators for joyful obedience. Fitzpatrick and Johnson explain this dynamic in a helpful way,

> Let us suggest that the obligations of the gospel become a burdensome duty simply because we don't spent [*sic*] enough time remembering what Jesus has already done for us. We have divided the love-inspiring declarations of the gospel from the obligations of the gospel so that obedience is simply a struggle, a discipline, a duty.[17]

And when believers come to remember and focus on the gospel-indicatives throughout Scripture, there are a multitude of gospel-implications that flow naturally out of their hearts.

**Change requires correctly understanding gospel-implications.** Gospel-implications are all those ramifications in the life of the believer that come as a result of the gospel-indicatives being internalized. Therefore, gospel-implications include different aspects of sanctification including obedience to direct biblical imperatives as well as the Christ-like attitudes, emotions, and mindset that Scripture declares the believer ought to possess in worshipful response to God's love. As Mike Emlet writes,

> This impulse toward transformation into the character of Christ (sanctification) is particularly seen in Paul's letters, many of which have what is called an 'indicative-imperative' structure. . . . But notice, *all* of Scripture is written with a pastoral intent, not simply the 'imperative' portions. The books of the Bible are meant to provoke a response in God's people, whether it be worship, conviction of sin, joy, deeds of justice and mercy, praise, prayer, concern for the lost, and so forth.[18]

All God-pleasing obedience, in thought and action, flows from a heart that is captivated and changed by the love of God. And every heart that is captivated and changed by the love of God demonstrates itself in God-pleasing obedience, in thought

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[17]Ibid., 104-05.

[18]Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 37.

and action.  As Lane and Tripp put so simply, "If the Christian is grounded in his or her new identity. . ., it will show itself in a life of repentance."[19]

The implications of the gospel necessitate an expectation of change and are, in fact, the only hope anyone has for true, lasting change.   This is the perspective that biblical pastoral theologians possess as they address problems in living in the lives of believers, and it is a truth that provides the only hope people can have to address those problems in a lasting and God-glorifying way.

**Contributions to a Biblical
Application of Truth**

**The centrality of love.**  Another popular title for personal ministry used by many biblical pastoral theologians is "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15).  This title reflects the centrality of gospel-motivated love to personal ministry.  While many counseling philosophies emphasize the importance of empathy and compassion, Scripture goes much further and demands that ministry be motivated by true, Christ-like love.  Even though his downplay of sound theology may be misstated, Paul Tripp powerfully and winsomely affirms love's centrality this way,

> I am deeply persuaded that the foundation for people-transforming ministry is not sound theology; it is love.  Without love, our theology is a boat without oars. Love is what drove God to send and sacrifice his Son.  Love led Christ to subject himself to a sinful world and the horrors of the cross.  Love is what causes him to seek and save the lost, and to persevere until each of his children is transformed into his image.[20]

To biblical pastoral theologians, love is not simply an important aspect of the application of biblical truth, it is the essential motivating component.  Like a car with no fuel, personal ministry is powerless without the motivating element of love.  As Powlison writes, "Wise counseling is essentially a way of loving another person well.  It is a way

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[19]Lane and Tripp, *How People Change,* 164.

[20]Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands,* 117.

of speaking what is true and constructive into *this* person's life right now. Good counseling is essentially wise love in action."[21] And when love is in action, all of the necessary components of personal ministry flow naturally. Listening, serving, speaking, and training in righteousness are all necessary to the task of personal ministry, and each of these aspects comes alive when empowered by love through the Spirit of God.

**The context of the local church.** Not only do biblical pastoral theologians affirm love as the key component of personal ministry, but they also affirm the local church as the primary context for personal ministry. As Powlison asserts,

> The Bible addresses not only ideas and practices, but social structure: institutions, communities, and programs. Does the Holy Spirit intend us to develop the social organization for curing souls? Yes. The church – as the Bible defines it – contains an exquisite blending of leadership and mutuality, of specialized roles and general calling, of truth and love, of wisdom for living, and of flexibility to meet the problems that sinners and sufferers face.[22]

The professionalization of counseling and therapy has taken the vast majority of personal ministry out of the local church and placed it in formal offices. Christian and secular psychologists alike prefer to help people with their problems in autonomous medical and counseling offices. At times, this kind of "ministry" may take place in group settings, but they are usually independent and unaffiliated groups. God, however, has designed the church body (the ongoing relationships of the family of God) to be the context in which consistent, ongoing personal ministry takes place. In addition, the members of the church body are not only called to be the context for personal ministry but the means of it as well. As Paul Tripp so insightfully asserts,

> Many of us would be relieved if God had placed our sanctification in the hands of trained and paid professionals, but that simply is not the biblical model. God's plan is that through the faithful ministry of every part, the whole body will grow to full maturity in Christ. The leaders of his church have been gifted, positioned, and

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[21]David Powlison, *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 5.

[22]Ibid., 110.

appointed to train and mobilize the people of God for this "every person, everyday" ministry lifestyle.[23]

Biblical pastoral theologians are the ones who have sought to return the ministry of counseling back to the context of the local church where God has designed it to take place.

This list of contributions is limited in both scope and depth, but it ought to provide a general summary of some of the fundamental contributions biblical pastoral theologians have made to an accurate understanding of problems in living and God's design for addressing them. However, the voices of biblical pastoral theologians are not the only voices Christians are hearing on the topic of problems in living. Therefore, the next two sections will be dedicated to evaluating two of the other most prominent voices in the church, those of integrative Christian psychologists and secular psychiatrists.

## Evaluating the Contributions of Integrative Christian Psychologists

Living in a highly psychologized culture, many Christians see licensed therapists as the first place to turn when experiencing problems in living. The idea that a pastor is the utmost authority on personal problems has long since become antiquated and psychologists and social workers have supplanted the pastorate as the principal cultural authorities regarding people and their problems. David Powlison recounts,

> In the century after the Civil War, the professional roles of asylum superintendent, psychological research scientist, and charity worker transmuted into a new secular psychotherapeutic pastorate. Professional jurisdiction over Americans' problems in living gradually passed from the religious pastorate to various medical and quasi-medical professions: psychiatry, neurology, social work, and clinical psychology.[24]

As this transition has taken root in the culture at large, it has become normal practice for Christians to pursue help with problems in living outside of the context of the local

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[23]Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands,* xi.

[24]Powlison, *Competent to Counsel?,* 42.

church. Simultaneous to this transition has taking place, however, the shortcomings and problematic assumptions of many of the secular psychological theories have also become widely recognized. It is for this reason that many Christians have turned to those who have the credentials that are expected in modern culture, but who also, presumably, share their convictions regarding God, sin, Christ, and the authority of Scripture: Christian psychologists.

Those who consider themselves Christian psychologists are as diverse a group as those who would consider themselves Christians. However, for the purposes of this project, the focus will be placed on those Christian psychologists who verbally affirm the authority of Scripture and actively pursue the integration of biblical truth and scientific research.[25] In conservative Christian circles these are the professionals to whom many of the members of gospel-centered, Bible-teaching churches will be referred (whether by a concerned friend, a seemingly trustworthy website, or even a well-meaning pastor) in order to address their problems in living.

In addition to sharing a belief in the authority of Scripture, Christian psychologists also generally share a conviction regarding the importance of scientific research. It is this latter conviction that leads to their broad denial of the sufficiency of Scripture to address the multi-faceted and diverse problems in living that people face. This section will evaluate the contributions of integrative Christian psychologists in light of this broad denial and its implications for both the theory and practice of their personal ministry.

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[25]This would include those who consider themselves Christian Psychologists as well as Integrationists, but would exclude those who hold to a "levels-of-explanation" view of Christianity and psychology, as their view essentially denies the authority of Scripture. For the purposes of this paper, both Christian Psychologists and Integrationists will be referred to generally as Christian psychologists. See Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 85-130; Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

**The Insufficiency of Scripture**

The most distinctive conviction that separates Christian Psychologists and Integrationists from biblical counselors is their fundamental denial of the sufficiency of Scripture to address problems in living. While Christian psychologists affirm the authority of Scripture, they do not believe that it is sufficient in the area of soul-care. Eric Johnson demonstrates this distinction between authority and sufficiency when he writes, "[I affirm] the Bible's authority and necessity in soul care, sufficiency in matters of salvation, and primacy in reference to other soul-care texts."[26] Johnson is one of the Christian psychologists who come closest to affirming the sufficiency of Scripture, but even when he tries to affirm it, his ultimate conclusion is that other sources of knowledge and wisdom are required for the "hard cases" of problems in living. He writes,

> The sufficiency of the Bible regarding psychology and soul care means that *the Bible is the Christian community's foundational psychology and soul care text, because it amply communicates enough about the nature of God, human beings and divine salvation that no other text is necessary for normal Christians to thrive psychospiritually.*[27]

In asserting that Scripture communicates enough for "normal Christians to thrive psychospiritually" Johnson implicitly denies that Scripture "communicates enough about the nature of God, human beings and divine salvation that no other text is necessary" for *abnormal* Christians, however abnormality may be defined.

Of course, Scripture declares itself completely sufficient as was demonstrated in the earlier exposition of 2 Peter 1:3-4. However Johnson even addresses this passage directly. He affirms that the Scriptures play "a central role," but he stops short of asserting that they are to play *the* sufficient role in spiritual growth. He explains,

> In this grammatically complicated passage [2 Pet 1:2-4], Peter wrote that everything necessary for life and godliness is gained through the knowledge of God and Jesus,

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[26]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, 19.

[27]Ibid., 188. Emphasis in the original.

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all of which God has promised. Since the Bible is the primary textual repository of the knowledge of God, as well as of God's promises, the Scriptures should be understood to play a central role in the spiritual growth to which Peter referred. However, Scripture is not explicitly referred to.[28]

Unfortunately, among Christian psychologists, Johnson is on the most conservative end of the theological spectrum. Many integrationists' denial of the sufficiency of Scripture is far less subtle than Johnson's and is rooted in a fundamental distrust of a Christian's ability to accurately discern ultimate, sufficient truth from Scripture. As two prominent Christian psychologists wrote recently,

> What puts theology at a special disadvantage is that the method by which God's message has been transmitted gives us positive reasons for doubting that our best interpretations of Scripture carry the same authority as God's (more) direct communications to the authors of Scripture.[29]

This view of Scripture undercuts not only the sufficiency of Scripture, but ultimately its claim to authority as well. It leads to a view that other sources of truth are not only beneficial, but necessary in order to determine ultimate truth because of the problematic nature of biblical interpretation. As Mark McMinn, one of the most prominent leaders in the integration movement writes,

> Even our views of Scripture can be distorted by our self-serving methods of interpretation. So we need additional moorings, beyond Scripture, in order to keep us firmly committed to a Christian appraisal of truth and falsehood. The Wesleyan quadrilateral suggests we turn to tradition, experience and reason.[30]

Similarly, in the most liberal corners of the integration movement, Scripture becomes simply another area of scientific study where all truth claims are weighed not by their degree of divine authority but by their degree of scientific certainty. As a result,

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[28]Ibid., 39. For another treatment of 2 Pet 1:2-4 denying its claim to absolute sufficiency see: Stanton L. Jones, "An Apologetic Apologia for the Integration of Psychology and Theology," in *Care For the Soul*, eds. Mark McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 66-67.

[29]David N. Entwistle and Aaron Preston, "Epistemic Rights vs. Epistemic Duties: A Reply to Porter," *J Psychol Christ* 29, no. 1 (2010): 29.

[30]Mark R. McMinn and Clark D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 209.

biblical truth receives no greater credence than any other object of study, and its truth

claims, while viewed as important, can barely be considered authoritative, let alone

sufficient.

> But to privilege theology over psychology as a way to begin such conversations (or
> to conclude them) does not seem to fit the phenomenon of human subjectivity or the
> basic affirmation of Christian scholarship that all truth is God's truth, whether seen
> in the pages of the Bible or in the pages of a psychological journal. Interpretation,
> mutual discernment, and engaged conversation are each important in this quest for
> God's truth.[31]

Whether among the more conservative Christian psychologists or the more liberal, their

shared convictions stem fundamentally from a view of general revelation that is too high

and a view of special revelation that is too low.

**Too high a view of general revelation.** Christian psychologists generally

assert, sometimes in their words but more often in their practice, that general revelation

can teach more than it truly is able. For example, Mark McMinn and Clark Campbell

verbally assert a theologically correct definition of the limits of general revelation:

"General revelation is enough to let us know that God exists and that there is something

majestic and beautiful about nature and humanity, but it is not enough to teach us about

the nature of God."[32] However, this limitation ceases to exist when the subject matter

turns from the nature of God to the nature of humans. Throughout their work McMinn

and Campbell stop short of asserting that general revelation can teach about the nature of

God, but they lean heavily on the observations and theories of scientists to teach about

the nature of humans.[33]

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[31]Steven J. Sandage and Jeannine K. Brown, "Monarchy or Democracy in Relation to
Integration? A Reply to Porter," *J Psychol Christ* 29, no. 1 (2010): 25.

[32]McMinn and Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy*, 48.

[33]Ibid., 21-54, 113-43. In these chapters, McMinn and Campbell claim to develop a "Christian
view of persons," however the view of persons that is promoted is far more in line with the view of persons
affirmed by some of the secular personality theories than it is biblical truth. This dependence on "general
revelation" is downplayed by putting Christian labels like the *Imago Dei* on secular concepts, but it is not a
view of persons that is developed from a careful study of special revelation.

Johnson similarly communicates how he believes that truth discovered through empirical study is necessary when discussing the nature of humans and soul care. On the topic of the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling he writes,

> The Reformation debate was concerned with the formulation of Christian doctrine and morality, a task that most Christians would agree centers on Scripture, whereas the current controversy concerns the nature of human beings and the care of their souls, topics that can be investigated empirically, in ways that the doctrine of God cannot be. Scripture addresses the former topics, to be sure, but not exhaustively, and we have to ask whether it was God's intention for Scripture to be the *sole* source of information *for these topics*.[34]

Because of the history of this debate, those who hope to build bridges with biblical pastoral theologians sometimes avoid terms like "general revelation." Johnson is a perfect example of this as he explicitly notes,

> Avoiding the term "general revelation" for psychology is especially important in our day. . . . "common grace" is a better theological term to refer to God's involvement in scientific research and the writing and reading of texts, since it refers to God's active goodness manifested in good human activity and its products, without implying that they flowed directly and infallibly from his mind.[35]

However, it is those not interested in building bridges with their theological colleagues who communicate most clearly and succinctly regarding how Christian psychologists view general revelation. Sandage and Brown are a keen example,

> If we want to compare equitably theology to psychology in terms of their place at the integrative table, we must compare equivalent entities. If we desire to compare the relative authorities of theology and psychology, we should not compare God's voice and authority directly to that of the psychological community . . . . Instead, we should compare special revelation and general revelation (in Bacon's analogy, the book of God's word and the book of God's works) as the knowledge bases for theology and psychology.[36]

While it would be disingenuous to infer that there is no substantive difference between the views of general revelation held by more conservative Christian Psychologists like

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[34]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, 179. Emphasis in the original.

[35]Ibid., 100.

[36]Sandage and Brown, "Monarchy or Democracy in Relation to Integration?" 21.

Johnson and more liberal Christian Psychologists like Sandage and Brown, the one thing they share in common is the fundamental assumption that scientific observation (whether explicitly referred to as "general revelation" or "common grace") is a *necessary* component to one's understanding of "the nature of humans and the care of their souls."

Space does not allow here for a full refutation of this understanding of general revelation or the implications of granting divine authority to human theories and discoveries (even if interpreted by Christians).  However, it ought to be noted that viewing any human discovery or theory as of equal authority with the revealed truth in Scripture fundamentally denies the *ultimate* authority of the Word of God.  Consequently, doing so grants a special-revelation-like authority to any claim or conclusion that a scientist makes.  As Douglas Bookman has explained so well,

> [The two-book] argument is flawed because it neglects the biblical concept that revelation is by definition nondiscoverable by human investigation or cogitation. . . . My contention is that by reason of the proper definition of the theological category 'general revelation' and by reason of the intrinsic and divine integrity and authority that must be granted to any truth-claim that is placed under that category, it is erroneous and misleading to assign to that category humanly deduced or discovered facts and theories. . . .
> [Because], first, there is the fallacy that might be termed *falsely perceived validity*.  Revelation is from God; thus it is by definition true and authoritative.  To assign human discoveries to the category of general revelation is to imbue them with an aura of validity and consequent authority that they do not, indeed, they cannot merit.
> [And] the second fallacy might be called *crippled accountability*.  That is, once it is acknowledged that these theories are revelatory in nature, the issue of challenging them becomes moot.[37]

**Too low a view of special revelation.**  In addition to holding too high a view of general revelation, Christian psychologists' fundamental denial of the sufficiency of Scripture also stems from a view of special revelation that is to low.  They affirm the importance of Scripture, but deny that it contains a holistic biblical psychology and

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[37]Douglas Bookman, "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, ed. John MacArthur and Wayne Mack (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1994), 72-74.

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theory of persons.  David Powlison sums up the problem this way:

> In effect, the impact of Christianity is restricted to what we might call narrowly religious topics.  Scripture is a resource that generally orients us (God's redemptive plan, the great doctrines of the faith), but doesn't give us detailed insight into how people work and how intentional conversations ought to proceed.[38]

Stanton Jones, representing the vast majority of Christian psychologists, explicitly denies the existence of a holistic biblical psychology when he writes,

> It is our contention that the Scriptures and Christian theology do not teach a theory of personality as understood by contemporary psychology. . . . they teach us less than we need to know to understand why individual persons have the characteristics they do (for instance, why a particular person struggles with obsessive tendencies or another is blessed with incredible strength of character).  And they teach us less than we need to know in order to help many individuals move beyond the pain and confusion they feel.[39]

There are numerous problems with this logic, but most fundamentally this belief *denies* that the very core of Scripture, the revelation of Jesus Christ and the news of the gospel, addresses the issues of pain and confusion that Jones identifies.  However, as was demonstrated in the earlier expositions of 1 Peter 1:3-7 and Colossians 3:1-14, the gospel, as revealed in Scripture, is absolutely sufficient to address all pain and confusion in the life of a believer, whether it be as a result of suffering or sin.

Similarly, McMinn fully agrees with Jones' conclusions regarding the limitations of Scripture.

> A complete model of personality would take an entire volume to develop, and it might leave the false impression that we dare present a definitive Christian psychology.  We agree with Jones and Butman (1991) that such a grand vision for a Christian psychology is unlikely to be accomplished.  They make this argument both because the bible does not provide a distinct personality theory and because the history of Christianity proves how difficult it is for Christians to agree on fundamental issues of faith.[40]

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[38]David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling Response to Integration," in *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views,* ed. Eric L. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 145.

[39]Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1991), 39-40.

[40]McMinn and Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy*, 113.

The latter point that McMinn raises here, that it is too difficult for Christians to agree on topics such as this, is a straw man. There are plenty of "fundamental issues of the faith" that he would assuredly affirm without appealing to such post-modern pessimism. The former point, however, is less of a fact than an assumption that demonstrates one of the key presuppositions that Christian psychologists hold: "the Bible does not provide a distinct personality theory." This presupposition has been demonstrated to be false throughout the past few decades as many different biblical pastoral theologians have continued to contribute to the development of a biblical theory of personality and motivation based on the biblical concepts of sin, suffering, idolatry, the heart, pride, selfishness, the world, the flesh, Satan, forgiveness, grace, and the gospel.[41]

**Largely Shaped by Secular Psychology
and Minimally Shaped by Biblical Truth**

If the greatest *causes* of Christian psychologists' denial of the sufficiency of Scripture are a high view of general revelation and a low view of special revelation, then the most significant *result* of their denial is an understanding of humanity that is largely shaped by secular psychology and minimally shaped by biblical truth. While Christian psychologists claim to pursue the full integration of Scriptural and scientific truth, this kind of integration has never truly taken place. This can be demonstrated by the fact that all attempts at integration have (1) misconstrued the most central parts of motivation and change as biblically understood and (2) demonstrated an alarming lack of appreciation for the depth and relevance of biblical truth in understanding people. David Powlison describes the problem this way,

> It is in addressing problems in living that integrationist psychology continues to
> have its most significant impact on the church: importing personality theories that
> misconstrue causality, and practicing psychotherapies that mediate such theories to

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[41]Examples include David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," *JBC* 13:2 (1995): 35-50; David Powlison, "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls," *JBC* 23:2 (2005): 2-14; Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*; Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997); Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams*.

struggling people. Integrationists have not seen and articulated the pointed relevance of Christian faith in the middle ground.[42]

When Christian psychologists *have* demonstrated the relevance of biblical truth and the gospel, however, it has only served to show that some of them are just beginning to understand and grasp the theory of persons that biblical pastoral theologians have been developing for decades (and, in truth, centuries).[43] Powlison continues,

> To the degree that an integrationist's approach to psychotherapy is 'shaped profoundly by his or her Christians convictions,' it comes to talk and act more and more like biblical counseling. But garden-variety integrationist counseling consistently misses Scripture's thick relevance.[44]

In his most general book on the integration task, McMinn writes quite candidly about the placement of theological truth and psychological truth in his and other Christian psychologists' professional framework.

> We need a map for spiritual growth . . . . Most of us do not want to replace our theoretical commitments to behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, family systems, and other forms of therapy, but we want a deeper understanding of the spiritual life and spiritual wisdom to see ourselves, our clients, and our counseling relationships more accurately.[45]

Here McMinn demonstrates that Christian psychologists' fundamental worldview commitment is to the secular theory (or theories) they find most compelling. Scripture is dismissed as a possible theoretical source and is relegated to a body of information that can possibly supplement and deepen their previously held theoretical commitments. They hope to "Christianize" their secular commitments, but in so doing they fail to realize that their primary allegiance is not to a God-given authority, but to a secular, pseudo-scientific one.

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[42]Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling Response to Integration," 146.

[43]Mark McMinn, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) is an excellent example of this. It leaves the biblically grounded reader exclaiming, "Where have you been?!"

[44]Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling Response to Integration," 147.

[45]Mark McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 34.

This results not in true integration as so many Christian psychologists hope, but in the secularizing of biblical concepts that are taken out of their theological framework and put to work in a secularized context.  McMinn provides two classic examples of this when he discusses the topics of forgiveness and prayer.  Regarding one particular case study, he provides this advice, "Kristen and her counselor might consider using forgiveness as a treatment strategy."[46]  Seeing forgiveness as both optional (something to "consider") and as a self-focused "treatment strategy" betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of biblical forgiveness, and demonstrates that the definition of the concept has been shaped more by secular psychology than biblical truth.[47]

Similarly, when discussing the topic of prayer in counseling McMinn, apparently questioning Scripture's strong affirmation of the efficacy and importance of prayer,[48] shockingly writes, "Until more research is reported, we can only speculate that the use of prayer outside counseling sessions provides therapeutic benefit."[49]

While these examples demonstrate the point effectively, the impact of the primacy of secular psychology among Christian psychologists is realized not only in their practical treatment strategies, but even more fundamentally in their theories of humanity. The fact that Christian psychologists are largely shaped by secular psychologies and only minimally shaped by biblical truth leads to significant misunderstandings regarding some of the most fundamental aspects of humanity and problems in living, namely: suffering, change, and the significance of the gospel.

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[46]Ibid., 57.

[47]Cf. Matt 18:21-35; Col 3:12-14; Luke 17:3-4; Eph 4:31-32.

[48]See Jas 5:13-18; Rom 15:30; Phil 1:3-11; 1 Tim 2:1-2.

[49]McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, 70.

**Misunderstanding of the nature of suffering.** Suffering is a universal experience in a fallen world and a fundamental aspect of the plethora of problems in living that people experience. A biblical view of suffering has been briefly described in the previous section, but it ought to be clearly asserted that a biblical perspective affirms that suffering is: (1) not the ultimate evil in a Christian's life (1 Pet 4:12-13), (2) allowed by an all good and all powerful God (Jas 1:2-4), and (3) used by God for his glory and the sanctification of his people (Rom 5:2-4).

Unfortunately, while the pain and significance of suffering should never be minimized, many Christian psychologists see suffering as a fundamental evil, the result of a fixable problem, and make their ultimate goal the relief of pain. As McMinn and Campbell write, "In [Integrative Psychotherapy] we see negative emotions as the alarm system of the human psyche. Painful emotions point to dysfunctional schemas and strained or broken relationships."[50] In response to this dysfunction, they see their role, most fundamentally, as pain relievers. They continue, "Our conclusion is that relieving pain is a noble and high calling, and domain 1 [Integrative Psychotherapy] is an effective means of accomplishing this . . . . Most people come [to a psychologist] for symptom relief, and psychologists are prepared to offer it."[51] While relieving pain may very well be a noble calling, and a beneficial result of the work of personal ministry, placing the focus of ministry on this goal demonstrates an underlying misunderstanding regarding the nature of suffering and God's purposes in it.

As has been shown, suffering possesses a whole host of proximate causes, none of which can be simplistically identified as the essential cause of a particular problem in living. Problems in living are far too complex to be able to simplistically assert their proximate causes with any great confidence, however this is what many

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[50]McMinn and Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy,* 121.

[51]Ibid., 125.

Christian psychologists continue to do (echoing the "certainty" of their secular colleagues). As Mark Yarhouse, Richard Butman, and Barrett McRae write, "Mood disorders ultimately spring from the rift that sin has driven between Creator and creature, but biological and sociocultural factors are usually the proximate causes."[52]

This assertion not only does not find any support in Scripture, but excludes many of the other proximate causes of suffering that Scripture does affirm (i.e., personal sin, Satan, the hand of God). This simplistic focus on the biological[53] and social causes of suffering characterizes the Christian psychologists' perspective. Jones and Butman also focus solely on these two causes of suffering:

> Many human problems are essentially natural evils rather than moral evils. Chemical brain imbalances appear to be predisposing factors in such disorders as manic-depressive illness, and are probably factors in other serious disorders. Not limited to biochemical problems, natural evil also occurs when people endure deprived or traumatic childhood environments and so suffer psychologically in adulthood for what they failed to receive as children.[54]

While a biblical perspective would never deny the reality of natural evils (such as a traumatic childhood or predisposing biological factors), by essentially denying the other proximate causes of suffering and neglecting to regularly place these evils in the context of God's sovereign purposes Christian psychologists regularly misunderstand and misrepresent the true nature of suffering, and are therefore ill-equipped to offer true and lasting hope, or to implement true and lasting change.

**Misunderstanding of the nature of biblical change.** In the former section on the contributions of biblical pastoral theologians the gospel-centered nature of change

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[52]Mark A. Yarhouse, Richard E. Butman, and Barrett W. McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 171.

[53]The focal point for Christian psychologists may even be further limited when it is recognized that many of the "biological causes" they are referring to are merely theories that are not necessarily supported by the best and most recent science (as will be discussed in the following section).

[54]Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies,* 52.

was briefly summarized.  This question of the nature of change is one of the greatest

areas where the secular impact upon the Christian psychologists' perspective can be seen.

Contrasted with the gospel-centered, Spirit empowered change described in Scripture,

Christian psychologists promote a model of change that is largely pragmatic and based on

questionable presuppositions.  For example, McMinn and Campbell talk about

transformation as though it simply "happens" in a multitude of disconnected ways.

> At the crux of every life is the question of transformation . . . . Transformation occurs in many ways.  Good sermons, kind words of affirmation, suffering, prayer, medication, meditation, encouraging smiles, criticism, solitude, effective parenting, ineffective parenting, charitable giving and comforting hugs are all means by which change occurs.  And, of course, the list could go on page after page.  Psychotherapy is only one means of transformation, but in today's society it has become an important and ubiquitous one.[55]

This depiction of transformation is divorced from the idea that change is purposeful and

happens by direct contact with the Spirit of God and the truth of scripture, for many of

these "ways" in which transformation occurs have no need for (in fact could not even

include) the truth of the gospel.

Confusion arises, however, when the deficiency which causes the need for

transformation is still identified as "sin" by Christian psychologists.  As Yarhouse,

Butman, and McRay write, "Sin engenders a constant background noise within this fallen

world and is reflected in the structures of society.  But we are not left without help."[56]

The reader would rejoice to find that there is hope in such a dismal situation, and that

God has provided a means by which to deal with sin.  However, the hope these authors

have to offer is, again, completely devoid of the gospel.  They continue,

> For a person who suffers from mood disorders as one expression of the world's fallenness, psychotropic medications can help bring balance to neurotransmitters that are not functioning as they should.  A careful reading of the available evidence suggests that psychotropic medications are potent catalysts for change . . . . Both

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[55]McMinn and Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy*, 387-88.

[56]Yarhouse, Butman, and McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies*, 174.

unipolar depression and bipolar disorders are difficult if not impossible to treat without chemical assistance.[57]

And herein lies one of the most fundamental disconnects between Christian psychologists and Scripture. While Scripture claims sufficiency for "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him" (2 Pet 1:3), Christian psychologists hold that some of the most common emotional problems in living that people inside and outside of the church experience are potentially "impossible to treat without chemical assistance."

Christian psychologists themselves are not ignorant of this fundamental divide. In fact, they explicitly reject the idea that the counselee may need to be instructed in specific "gospel-implications" or "gospel-imperatives." Mark McMinn explains,

> Counselors who believe their job is to help clients identify and repent of specific acts of disobedience are placing themselves in a position of arbitrary authority where arrogance is difficult to escape . . . . It seems better to view confession as a lifestyle that is practiced by a counselor and learned by clients because of the collaborative nature of counseling. Confession from this perspective is more often a confession of general need than a confession of specific sin. Counselor and client together acknowledge the limits, weaknesses, and needs associated with being human, and look for strength in Christian faith and community.[58]

The fact that McMinn believes that "change" is possible simply through the confession of general need that does not include a confession of specific sin (in thought or action) belies the fact that the kind of transformation he is aiming for is not gospel-transformation at all, and is something completely different than biblical progressive sanctification.

This disconnect is only highlighted further when it is understood that Christian psychologists generally do not see any difference between the potential for change in a believer and in one who rejects Christ. Stanton Jones takes this difference head on when he writes,

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[57]Ibid.

[58]McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality*, 200.

Some people who are of a conservative theological persuasion state as a matter of fact that the unregenerate cannot change because their will is dead, enslaved to sin. . . . The bondage of the will does not mean, however, that we must reject *a priori* the possibility that the unregenerate can change meaningfully. We can help the unregenerate to change meaningfully, and in a moment I will argue that this is a good thing.[59]

Jones makes the distinction perfectly clear. He believes that "meaningful change" is possible without the gospel. While it cannot be denied that some sort of external change in lifestyle or actions is possible for all who can muster up enough willpower or employ a sufficiently emotionally-manipulative tactic, Scripture never refers to this kind of external change as "meaningful." In fact, it teaches the exact opposite (Matt 5:21-30; Luke 6:43-45; Eph 4:17-24). A belief in the bondage of the will carries with it the very assumption that Jones denies, that humans are incapable of meaningful change on their own and are hopelessly and desperately in need of God's work in and through the gospel. Because of the deceptive nature of purely external change (masquerading as "true" or "meaningful") it can hardly be argued that it is a "good thing."

**Misunderstanding of the nature of the gospel.** This misunderstanding regarding the spiritual nature of change flows from an even more significant misunderstanding regarding the nature of the gospel. As was demonstrated in the expositions of 1 Pet 1:3-7 and Col 3:1-14 in chapter two, the gospel is sufficient to address all problems in living that people face. However, many Christian psychologists do not see or understand the gospel in this light. They more often see the gospel simply as sufficient to provide entrance into heaven and to be considered a "Christian," but deny its sufficiency to address the "real" and "difficult" problems that people face. Yarhouse, Butman, and McRay demonstrate this perspective when they refer to gospel-transformation simply as something to be awaited for in "eternal life."

Those who profess to believe in God and the veracity of the Scriptures embrace common elements of a distinct view of persons – that human beings are created in

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[59]Jones, "An Apologetic Apologia for the Integration of Psychology and Theology," 72.

the image of God, are disordered by sin and await transformation into the likeness of Christ in eternal life.[60]

Christian psychologists will sometimes expand their application of the gospel beyond simply admission into heaven, but only in order to treat it as a model for their own counseling. While the idea of modeling one's ministry after Christ is, undeniably, an appropriate application of the gospel, Christian psychologists model their "approach" after the gospel, but do not incorporate the gospel itself as the necessary means by which problems may be addressed. As Mark McMinn writes,

> Those who enter therapy in the midst of their pain experience a restorative counseling relationship that brings acceptance, hope, and meaning to their broken lives. In this sense, counseling mimics the gospel – people are broken, and broken people are restored in the context of a healing relationship.[61]

Notice that the "restorative relationship" that takes place in this kind of ministry is the relationship of the counselee to the therapist. The gospel message was intended to be much more than a model; it is the means by which one may experience the only truly restorative relationship possible, a relationship with Christ. When Christian psychologists "model" the gospel in this way, while their motives may be sincere, they are not offering themselves as a gospel relationship, but instead are offering themselves as a gospel replacement.

Even when Christian psychologists recognize that the problem is sin (as seen in the Yarhouse, et. al. quote above), they consistently stop short of integrating the fact that the answer to the problem of sin is the gospel. In fact, many Christian psychologists explicitly reject the idea that spiritual conversion by recognition of the truth of the gospel is a necessary component to personal ministry. Mark McMinn expresses this clearly. "Though evangelism leading to spiritual conversion is rarely a part of counseling, a healthy Christian-counseling relationship often encourages clients to explore religious

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[60]Yarhouse, Butman and McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies*, 174.

[61]McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality,* 20-21.

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values and faith during and after counseling."[62]

The most disheartening aspect of this misunderstanding of the gospel is that many Christian psychologists actually recognize the deficiency, but don't see it as important enough to stop and address. As Yarhouse, Butman, and McRay confess,

> Though underdeveloped at this time, a Christian understanding of grace and its thoughtful application to the field should have far-reaching implications that help guide practitioners towards what is being referred to as a positive psychology, a move away from focusing exclusively on pathology.[63]

A "Christian understanding of grace" is at the core of what it means to be Christian. If a "Christian understanding of grace" is "underdeveloped at this time," and the modern endeavor of integrative Christian psychology has been developing for over a half a century, then it begs the question, "What have they been studying?" The answer, as has been demonstrated, is not the Bible, the person of Christ, or the message of the gospel, but instead the theories and philosophies of modern secular psychology. This focus has left the teaching and practice of Christian psychology largely shaped by secular theories and practices and dangerously devoid of the message of the gospel and the person of Christ.

**The Accountability Issue: Ministry**
**Divorced from the Local Church**

As a consequence of Christian psychiatrists' denial of the sufficiency of Scripture and the importance placed on the scientific community, a final issue that will be considered is the fact that the work of Christian psychiatrists is essentially ministry that is divorced from the local church. This fact is usually justified by the Christian psychiatrist's assertion that they are not doing "ministry" in the biblical sense. As McMinn asserts,

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[62]Ibid., 240.

[63]Yarhouse, Butman and McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies*, 104.

Spiritual direction has historically been offered under the authority of the church. . . . In contrast, psychotherapists are under the authority of state regulating bodies that grant licenses, establish ethical standards and regulate compliance . . . . we are quite insistent that [Integrative Psychotherapy] is psychotherapy and not a form of spiritual direction.[64]

Therefore, integrative psychotherapy is to be seen as a social activity under the authority of the state, not a spiritual activity under the authority of the local church. The problem is, McMinn and others still speak of their work as, essentially, a spiritual activity, sanctioned, instituted, and governed by Scripture. He writes later,

Broadly speaking, relational methods in psychotherapy can be conceptualized as strategies to provide simultaneous support and confrontation (grace and truth) . . . . Interestingly, the apostle Paul describes a simple yet profound mechanism for growth and maturity that includes the concepts of support and confrontation. Ephesians 4:14-15 states: 'Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ' (NIV, italics added).[65]

As was demonstrated in the earlier exposition of Ephesians 4:11-16, this passage explicitly teaches that this ministry takes place through the community of believers in the context of the local church. McMinn, as with most Christian psychologists, desires to have his cake and eat it too. They desire to think of themselves as ministers in a biblical sense, and to have other Christians think of them in that way (since that is the basis of their clientele). However, even as ministers in the biblical sense they desire to submit themselves not to the authority of the local church, but instead to the authority of the state, which, from a biblical point of view, ought to be considered as having no spiritual authority at all.

Christian psychologists who minister outside of the context of the local church may have accountability to secular professional and ethical standards, but they have no accountability to biblical qualifications or standards. One does not need to be qualified

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[64]McMinn and Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy*, 358.

[65]Ibid., 372.

according to the qualifications of a servant minister in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 to be licensed and approved by the state. Similarly, no level of theological and biblical understanding is required to be licensed as a Christian psychologist.

And despite this lack of accountability, Christian psychologists, simply on the basis of their scientific studies, claim to be the ones to whom the church ought to turn when they face problems in living that are particularly difficult. As Jones writes, "I urge a modest role for psychology in direct partnership with the church, to work with the unusual problems, those that are intractable to the usual means of grace and growth that are available in the church."[66] Therefore, in addition to not being under the authority of the local church, Christian psychologists envision the church as under their authority in regards to problems in living that can be categorized as "unusual problems."

This all results in a class of Christian ministers who deny the sufficiency of Scripture, are largely shaped by secular theories, and are not accountable to any biblically instituted authority. It is for these reasons that all Christians ought to be cognizant and careful of the impact and influence of Christian psychology and integration in the church. Although widely practiced and prevalent within and around the church, anyone who ministers biblically to those with problems in living must be aware of the potential impact of Christian psychology and understand how it will shape the thoughts and perceptions of those to whom they minister.

**Possible Helpful Contributions**

While there is much to critique of the integrative psychology movement, it is also important to take a brief look at a couple of potentially helpful contributions that may be gleaned from their labor. For all of the weaknesses, there are still aspects of their work that help to identify weaknesses in the work of pastoral biblical theologians and can

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[66]Jones, "An Apologetic Apologia for the Integration of Psychology and Theology," 77.

be helpful as a more accurate biblical understanding of humanity and problems in living continues to be developed.

**Appreciation of the complexity of the relationship between sin and suffering.** It can be tempting, at times, for biblical counselors to oversimplify the relationship between sin and suffering as though there are neatly constructed compartments where each resides. Throughout all of their in-depth study, however, Christian psychologists have oftentimes had a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the relationship between sin and suffering than many in the pastorate. Christian psychologists tend to be willing to ask the tough questions regarding all the forms and consequences of sin and how they relate to suffering.[67] As a result, they tend to be quite compassionate when it comes to the difficulty and complexity of the experience of problems in living in ways that ought to be noticed and learned from.

For example, Yarhouse, Butman, and McRay make this observation regarding the complexity of factors at play in addiction.

> What do we do then with antecedent physiological, neurological, psychological and environmental conditions that place a person at risk for addiction? These antecedents are the consequences of sin and reflections of our fallen human condition. We must come to appreciate the complexities of these antecedents in setting the stage for a potentially destructive drama . . . . Christians must have an eye for the complexity of addiction, so that we can offer a meaningful account of personal responsibility and human agency in relation to physiological, environmental and other factors.[68]

Yarhouse's closing charge in this paragraph ought to be heeded by all who seek to do personal ministry. Appreciating the complexity of the relationship between sin (both personal sin and sin's effects in a fallen world) and suffering is essential to ministering

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[67]Ironically, this willingness to appreciate the complexity of the relationship between sin and suffering oftentimes morphs into simplistic pragmatic solutions when actually practiced, as was discussed earlier. It is for this reason that Christian psychologists can be both commended for their appreciation of complexity and criticized for their pragmatic simplicity.

[67]Yarhouse, Butman and McRay, *Modern Psychopathologies*, 200.

compassionately and wisely to those who are struggling with any kind of problem in living.

**Ability to speak the scientific language in a scientific culture.** The second contribution that ought to be considered is the Christian psychologist's ability to speak the scientific language fluently in a culture that is inundated with scientific vocabulary and concepts. Because of their exposure to psychiatrists, psychologists, college courses, or even popular periodicals, many of those within modern churches have great respect for the scientific language (labels and descriptions) that is so prevalent. As a result, being able to communicate accurately using the terms and concepts that the scientific community uses, can be of great benefit in personal ministry, even if it is simply to correct or redefine those terms.

In fact, Christians will be unable to effectively redefine the most culturally significant terms unless they are able to fully understand them and the concepts that come with them. In addition, pastoral theologians will only be able to identify those terms that are in the most need of correction or redefinition if they understand the scientific language with at least the same proficiency as many Christian psychologists. Eric Johnson provides a helpful comment on this point.

> Typically, naïve Christian readers of a modern text understand less than they think they do, unaware of the mostly implicit, distorting worldview beliefs of its author. The modernist context of modern psychological discourse requires, then, that Christian translators become so proficient in the 'second dialect' of the modern psychology tradition that they understand it as well as a first dialect.[69]

Although Johnson is speaking primarily of professional discourse, this kind of psychological discourse is not only required in academia, but in any church with well educated members who have attended universities where psychology classes (or at least psychological concepts) are requirements regardless of one's area of study. In fact, this

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[69]Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, 229-30.

kind of discourse will be required in any church where one's members have previously been to either a psychiatrist or psychologist, which would probably include almost every church in America.

## Evaluating the Contributions of Secular Psychiatrists

We not only live in a psychologized culture, but in a largely psychiatrized culture as well. "The percentage of the US population using at least 1 psychotropic medication increased from 5.9% in 1996 to 8.1% in 2001."[70] This trend has only continued to climb over the past decade as demonstrated by the radical uptick in the use of anti-depressants specifically. "Between 1996 and 2005, the overall annual rate of anti-depressant treatment among persons 6 years and older increased from 5.84 to 10.12 per 100 persons."[71] Consequently, more and more Christians are also taking psychotropic medications, and many will talk to their doctor about specific problems in living before they ever bring the issues to the attention of their pastor. It is for these reasons that it is important to consider what Christians are hearing from the psychiatric community, to evaluate these messages biblically, and to help others understand what dangers or benefits can be identified regarding a psychiatric perspective.

The prevalence of psychiatric drugs in general, and anti-depressants in particular, has become dizzying. For example, speaking of the most popular class of anti-depressants (SSRIs), one popular textbook observes,

> Rarely has a class of drugs transformed a field as dramatically as the SSRIs have transformed clinical psychopharmacology. Introduced in the late 1980s, most are now off patent, but not before becoming so widely prescribed within psychiatry, mental health, and primary care that up to six prescriptions per second, around the clock and around the year are said to be written for these agents.[72]

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[70]Mark Olfson and Steven C. Marcus, "National Patterns in Antidepressant Medication Treatment," *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 66 (2009): 848.

[71]Ibid., 850.

[72]Stephen M. Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmachology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 185.

Because of the meteoric rise in popularity and widely diverse uses of psychotropic drugs,

Christians ought to be diligent to understand not only the potential benefits of these

medications, but also the potential dangers not only of the drugs themselves, but of the

system that so widely promotes them.  This section will evaluate some of the

foundational aspects of psychiatry from a biblical perspective, but first, it is also

important to at least note that significant critiques of the modern psychiatric system come

not only from biblical Christians but also from many within the field itself.  In fact, the

cultural fortress that is modern psychiatry may have many more cracks than is widely

assumed in popular culture.

**Cultural and Scientific Critiques**

Space, and the nature of this project, does not allow for an in-depth discussion

of the many cultural and scientific critiques of modern psychiatry.  However, it seems

appropriate to at least mention a sample of the significant issues that exist in order to

provide a more accurate interpretation of the scientific community's attitude towards

psychiatry, which is almost exclusively portrayed in public as complete confidence.

It is, in fact, the public portrayal of the virtues of psychotropic medications that

ought to be a significant reason for concern.  Public perception, and therefore the

perception of many of the believers in local churches, is very easily created and changed

through popular media and advertisements.  Pharmaceutical companies know this, and

this is why they have invested so heavily in direct-to-consumer advertising for their

prescription drugs.

> Although there was little change in total promotional spending for antidepressants
> between 1999 ($0.98 billion) and 2005 ($1.02 billion), there was a marked increase
> in the percentage of this spending that was devoted to direct-to-consumer
> advertising, from 3.3% ($32.00 million) to 12.0% ($122.00 million).[73]

Drug companies are switching the target of their advertising dollars from professionals to

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[73]Olfson and Marcus, "National Patterns in Antidepressant Medication Treatment," 853.

the general public in order to sway public perception toward their products.[74]

Unfortunately, the cultural power these companies have is not only manifest in their relationship with the general public, but in their relationship with regulatory organizations, like the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), as well. While the FDA is known for its rigorous requirements, numerous studies in the past decade have demonstrated that the selective publication of only those studies that achieve positive results has significantly skewed the perception of efficacy among both the general public and professionals in such a way that true drug efficacy is difficult to determine.[75] As one observer summarizes,

> The FDA requires two adequately conducted clinical trials showing a significant difference between drug and placebo [for official approval]. But there is a loophole: there is no limit to the number of trials that can be conducted in search of these two significant trials. Trials showing negative results simply don't count.[76]

While these cultural critiques are significant and concerning, critiques of modern psychiatry have been leveled by the scientific community as well. Another critique aimed at the nature of psychiatric medical studies is the general lack of account for the effects of an inert placebo on studies that require subjective symptom

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[74]The significance and impact of this focus on consumers cannot be overstated. Many authors have studied and written about the shocking effects of these advertising campaigns, and these effects ought to be expected in the church as well. "The enthusiastic promotion of antianxiety drugs as a first-line treatment for anxiety disorders should not come as a surprise. These products are developed by businesses that profit from their sale. Strategies that bring drugs to market and promote their use are likely to be preferred over those that do not. The application of rigorous scientific methodology may not be in the best interest of business. As a result, marketing needs dictate research outcomes rather than the reverse" (William G. Danton and David O. Antonuccio, "A Focused Empirical Analysis of Treatments for Panic and Anxiety," in *From Pacebo to Panacea*, ed. Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg [New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997], 263-64). See also Olfson and Marcus, "National Patterns in Antidepressant Medication Treatment," 848-56; Jeffrey R. Lacasse and Jonathan Leo, "Serotonin and Depression: A Disconnect between the Advertisements and the Scientific Literature," *PLoS Medicine* 2 (2005): 1211-16; Kristi A. Frankenberger et al., "Effects of Information on College Students' Perceptions of Antidepressant Medication," *JACH* 53, no. 1 (2004): 35-50.

[75]Erick H. Turner et al., "Selective Publication of Antidepressant Trials and Its Influence on Apparent Efficacy," *N Engl J Med* 358, no. 3 (2008): 252-60; Irving Kirsch, "Medication and Suggestion in the Treatment of Depression," *Contemporary Hypnosis* 22, no. 2 (2005): 59-66.

[76]Irving Kirsch, "Medication and Suggestion in the Treatment of Depression," 64.

measurement by participants.  In short, many studies are not perfectly controlled by comparing the studied medication to an active placebo (a placebo that produces side affects).  As a result, participants will usually have a sense of whether or not they are taking the drug or a placebo, based on the presence or absence of side affects, and the drug may end up having a greater *psychological* effect on symptoms than a *biological* one.[77]  In fact, as experts Seymour Fisher and Roger Greenberg note, "Placebo effects have so impressed some observers that they have proposed giving placebos to the distressed, first, before offering the active drug . . . . An issue that is immediately raised about such placebos is that they call for deception."[78]  They then conclude, "A biologically pure treatment for psychological disturbance has been and remains a mythic hope."[79]

While the designation of a "biologically pure treatment" as a "mythic hope" may be news to the general public and the millions of consumers who take psychotropic medication, unfortunately, it would not be surprising at all to those actually doing the scientific research.  In fact, the simple chemical imbalance theories that are so widely accepted in modern culture and promoted through pharmaceutical advertisements are, in reality, refuted by the scientific evidence.  As Stephen Stahl writes in his leading psychopharmacology textbook,

> Unfortunately, little progress has been made yet in defining the biological causes of mental illnesses by using these approaches [PET, CT, MRI, etc.].  No single reproducible abnormality in any neurotransmitter or in any of its enzymes or

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[77]See William G. Danton and David O. Antonuccio, "A Focused Empirical Analysis of Treatments for Panic and Anxiety," in *From Pacebo to Panacea*, ed. Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 264; Sharon Begley, "The Depressing News about Antidepressants," *Newsweek*, 8 February 2010; Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg, "The Curse of the Placebo: Fanciful Pursuit of a Pure Biological Therapy," in *From Pacebo to Panacea*, ed. Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 44; Kirsch, "Medication and Suggestion in the Treatment of Depression," 63.

[78]Fisher and Greenberg, "The Curse of the Placebo," 45.  Interestingly, the possible deception involved in offering active drugs that are not any more effective than placebos is generally dismissed.

[79]Ibid., 46.

receptors has been shown to cause any common psychiatric disorder.  Indeed, it is no longer considered likely that one will be found, given the complexity of psychiatric diagnosis and the profound interaction of environmental factors with genetics in psychiatric disorders.[80]

In speaking specifically of serotonin, the chemical targeted by the most popular class of anti-depressants (SSRIs), another expert writes,

> Contemporary neuroscience research has failed to confirm any serotonergic lesion in any mental disorder, and has in fact provided significant counterevidence to the explanation of a simple neurotransmitter deficiency.  Modern neuroscience has instead shown that the brain is vastly complex and poorly understood.  While neuroscience is a rapidly advancing field, to propose that researchers can objectively identify a "chemical imbalance" at the molecular level is not compatible with the extant science.  In fact, there is no scientifically established ideal "chemical balance" of serotonin, let alone an identifiable pathological imbalance.  To equate the impressive recent achievements of neuroscience with support for the serotonin hypothesis is a mistake.[81]

Here is one of the most honest and accurate conclusions that the scientific community has been able to come to regarding neuroscience and how the human brain functions: "the brain is vastly complex and poorly understood."

This admission leads to a final scientific critique, and that is in regards to the problematic nature of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV).  While the DSM-IV will be addressed more in depth and from a biblical perspective in the following section, it ought to be noted here that the critiques of this foundational resource come not only from the theological community, but from the scientific community as well.  As Robert C. Carson, a longtime Duke University professor, writes,

> The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 1994) represents a prescientific stage of development with respect to an attempt to bring taxonomic order to aberrant behavior phenomena, deemed *psychopathological* and hence the imputed manifestation of one or another form of mental disorder . . . the *DSM* approach to organizing the phenomena of disordered behavior is fundamentally

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[80]Stephen M. Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmachology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102.

[81]Lacasse and Leo, "Serotonin and Depression," 1212.

flawed to the degree that research advance in the field is seriously hampered by its pervasive influence.[82]

However, the most significant critique of both psychiatry in general and the DSM-IV in particular comes not from the authority of scientists and scientific observers who are, ultimately, able to err, but from the pages of Scripture where a perfect representation of truth that is able to evaluate every theory of people and their problems is found.

**Biblical Critiques**

       **The use of the DSM-IV.**  One of the chief weaknesses of modern psychiatric practice, from a biblical perspective, is found in its complete dependence on the DSM-IV. In order for a Christian to pursue the use of psychotropic medications, they must not only have confidence in the theories behind the medications, but also in the diagnostic system that determines the need for them.  As one psychopharmacology textbook states in a table identifying the fundamental "Principles of Psychopharmacotherapy": "Principle 1: The *diagnostic assessment*, subject to revisions, is fundamental to our model."[83]  However, *why* the diagnostic assessment is so fundamental is also important to identify.  Later on, this same textbook provides the basis for this importance.

> The diagnostic assessment [based on the *DSM-IV-TR*] serves many purposes:
> - It is a *shorthand way of labeling and referring* to patients complaints
> - It *provides a way of conceptualizing complaints* within the framework of our current knowledge so that appropriate treatment can be instituted.
> - It *facilitates research* by allowing data to be systematically collected from different patients with the same condition
> - It is important for *billing*[84]

In essence, the current diagnostic assessment (DSM-IV) is not used to identify verifiable

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[82]Robert C. Carson, "Costly Compromises: A Critique of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," in *From Pacebo to Panacea*, ed. Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 99.  See Carson's entire article for a devastating critique of the entire DSM project.

[83]Philip G. Janicak et al., *Principles and Practice of Psychopharmacotherapy*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2006), 2.  Emphasis in the original.

[84]Ibid., 317-18.  Emphasis in the original.

diseases or disorders, but simply to summarize and conceptualize a patient's complaints

so that the psychiatrist can (1) legally administer treatment, (2) facilitate research, and (3)

bill for services. Because so little is truly knowable about the nature of a patient's

complaints, the importance of objective accuracy is essentially ignored. As another

leading textbook admits, "Mental illnesses are defined as mixtures of symptoms

packaged into syndromes . . . . Thus, mental illnesses are not diseases."[85]

The question must be asked, then, are these summary terms the most accurate

descriptions to conceptualize people's experiences and problems in living? Since

Scripture itself provides summary terms and concepts for the very same "symptoms" that

the DSM-IV is based on (i.e., sadness, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, anger, internal

voices, external suffering, etc.), the Christian ought to evaluate the labels of the DSM-IV

by measuring the extent to which they correlate with the concepts of Scripture.

Unfortunately, this will leave much of the DSM-IV in doubt, for it presuppositionally

denies the existence and implications of a personal God, sin, judgment, salvation,

sanctification, the work of Christ on the cross, the work of the Holy Spirit, or eternal life.

Therefore, if the reliability of the DSM-IV is in question from the perspective

of a Christian worldview, and the DSM-IV is "fundamental to the

[psychopharmacotherapy] model," the entire enterprise of psychiatry ought to be viewed

suspiciously and evaluated carefully before it is practiced or suggested by Christians.

**Mind/body relationship.** A second problematic assumption that lies behind all

psychiatric practice is its monistic anthropology. Psychiatric work assumes that problems

in the body (brain chemistry specifically) *cause* problems in living. Even the more

nuanced developments in the field of psychopharmacology still see problems in living as

fundamentally determined and unavoidable. As Stephen Stahl writes in his classic

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[85]Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmachology*, 3rd ed., 178.

psychopharmacology textbook, "In order to manifest an overt psychiatric disorder, one must not only sustain the first hit, namely all the critical genetic vulnerabilities, but one must also sustain a second hit of some type from the environment."[86]  From this point of view, problems in living are unavoidable given genetics and life experience, and since life experience cannot be systematically altered, the only thing left to do is to treat the problematic brain chemistry.

However, Scripture does not understand either suffering or problems in living so simplistically.  While Scripture affirms the unity of the body and soul (Gen 2:7, 1 Cor 15:51-54), it also clearly communicates that these two parts both clearly exist as distinct from one another (Rom 8:10).[87]  In addition, Scripture affirms that the body is not the cause of problems in living, but the mediator.  As Ed Welch writes,

> The whole person consists of body and heart [mind] together.  Both are essential and neither can function in the material realm in isolation of the other . . . . The unique contribution of the body to the whole person is that it is the *mediator* of moral action rather than the *initiator*.[88]

Welch continues his argument by affirming the fact that personal experience and even moral actions may be correlated to brain chemistry, but that it is a logical leap to assume that brain chemistry causes these experiential realities.

> At the level of the brain, this [mind/body] unity suggests that the heart or spirit will always be *represented* or *expressed* in the brain's chemical activity. When we choose good or evil, such decisions will be accompanied by changes in brain activity . . . . This does not mean that the brain *causes* these decisions. It simply means that the brain renders the desires of the heart in a physical medium. It is as if the heart always leaves its footprint on the brain.[89]

Therefore, believing in the centrality of the heart (soul) in human experience and functioning, Christians must reject the simplistic assumption that problems in living are,

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[86]Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmachology*, 2nd ed., 107.

[87]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 472-489.

[88]Edward T. Welch, *Blame it one the Brain?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 40.

[89]Ibid., 47-48.

essentially, a biological problem.

**The goal of ministry/treatment.** Pure scientific proof of the efficacy and mechanisms of psychotropic medications are, obviously, not the driving factor for their popularity. So, why are they so widely used and prescribed? The answer, very simply, is because people think they "work." But, what is meant by "work"? The practical goal of all current psychotropic medications is to alleviate some of the psychological symptoms in the patient. But, how does this goal stand up to or compare to the biblical goal of personal ministry? Is pain relief an appropriate biblical goal?

If pain or symptom relief is the *ultimate* goal of personal ministry or psychological treatment, this necessarily stems from a heart that is ultimately focused on self. God desires his children to have a greater goal in the midst of suffering. He desires that the ultimate goal not be symptom focused, but focused on his worship and glory. And when the ultimate goal is God's glory, sufferers are willing to submit to the fact that God has purposes for their suffering that are more important than their comfort. As Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson write,

> [God has] equipped us with the ability to experience emotional pain so that we can understand our heart. You can see, then, how a problem can arise when we seek to deaden this pain instead of addressing the desires, wrong thinking, or distorted attitudes that may be driving the pain.[90]

We see God's desire to use suffering throughout the pages of Scripture. One key example can be found in the beginning of James' epistle,

> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

As is seen here, God's goal in the midst of trials and pain is to use these experiences to sanctify his children. When one pursues relief from pain (the very pain

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[90]Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 50.

that God desires to use) as the ultimate goal in "treatment," he or she is allowing self-focused goals to trump God-focused ones.[91]  This does not mean that the avoidance of pain is always inappropriate.  However, when seeking to evaluate current psychiatric practices, it must be readily acknowledged that the chief goal of these practices is very different than the chief goal of biblical personal ministry.

**Care of the body.**  The final critique that will be mentioned here addresses the topic of a Christian's stewardship of his or her body.  Even *if* psychotropic drugs were beneficial in some demonstrable way, so little is still known about the brain and how it works that the negative effects (i.e., harmful changes in brain circuitry, addiction, side effects, etc.) are largely unknown.  As was stated earlier, "the brain is vastly complex and poorly understood."[92]

Because of this lack of understanding, psychotropic medications pose a significant risk that should not be underestimated.  As one psychiatrist writes,

> All biopsychiatric interventions cause generalized brain dysfunction.  Although specific treatments do have recognizably different effects on the brain, they share the capacity to produce generalized dysfunction with some degree of impairment across the spectrum of emotional and intellectual function.  Because the brain is so highly integrated, it is not possible to disable circumscribed mental functions without impairing a variety of other functions, typically causing generalized dysfunction of the brain and mind.[93]

For Christians it is important to remember that the body of the believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit.  As a result, Paul provides a powerful example when he writes, 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Cor 6:12).  While psychotropic drugs may be lawful for the Christian, one must be diligent to ask the larger questions regarding whether or not

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[91]See also Jas 1:12.

[92]Lacasse and Leo, "Serotonin and Depression," 1212.

[93]Peter R. Breggin, *Brain-Disabling Treatments in Psychiatry* (New York: Stringer Publishing Company, 2008), 2.

they will be helpful or harmful in the long run, and what their potential to master the user

may be.  In their extremely helpful book on the topic, Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson

describe the dilemma this way,

> Psychiatric medicines can help suppress bad thoughts and feelings, but they can also produce changes in the brain that can lead to even worse problems than the ones that led a person to take the medicines in the first place.  These medicines may change an individual's brain structure and function over time.  Recent research suggests that some drugs may even rewire the brain as they produce relief of symptoms.  The problem is that we don't really understand enough about how the brain works to be certain that this rewiring is good.[94]

While the critiques mentioned here are too brief for the in-depth discussion that each

point deserves, this ought to provide a helpful structure through which the believer can

evaluate the true wisdom and efficacy of psychotropic medications since so many of the

people they seek to minister to will be exposed to if not currently taking these drugs.

**Possible Helpful Contributions**

While there is much to be critiqued in the modern practice of psychiatry, it is

also important to take a brief look at a few potentially helpful contributions that may be

gleaned from the world of psychiatry and neuroscience.  For all of their weaknesses, there

are at least a few ways that Christians can appreciate the perspective gained from this

area of common grace.

**A temporary relief from dangerous symptoms.**  While there ought to be

many concerns regarding the use of psychotropic drugs, as demonstrated in the previous

section, there may still be a limited amount of situations in which their use may be

appropriate to help temporarily address symptoms that have become so severe that they

pose a potentially immediate risk to the sufferer, or those around them.  Fitzpatrick and

Hendrickson share this perspective when they write,

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[94]Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson, *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?* 55.

If a woman is struggling with life-threatening behavior or suicidal thinking, medicine should be used to bring her situation under control. This does not necessarily mean that the behavior or thoughts are a disease requiring drug treatment, but rather, that medicine may help calm her down, clear her thinking, or relax her so that she doesn't harm herself or others.[95]

In these types of situations, the benefit gained from clarity of thought may provide an appropriate justification for the temporary use of psychotropic drugs, although all of the risks, side effects, and potential impact on the natural chemistry of the brain ought to always be taken into consideration.

**An appreciation for the complexity of the human mind.** One of the greatest advantages that psychiatrists and neuroscientists have is access to the data that demonstrates just how vastly complex and intricately designed the human mind is. For, there are a multitude of aspects of human consciousness, emotions, memory, etc. that remain great mysteries to even the leading experts in these fields. Those who do pure research in the fields of psychiatry and neuroscience can sometimes be the least likely to be reductionistic and simplistic because they have observed the reality that human "mental health" is not simply determined by genetics or chemistry, but involves a whole host of vastly diverse and complex variables that are, in reality, immeasurable (i.e. "stress"). As Stahl writes,

Adding to the complexity of "complex genetics" is the observation that genes alone are not necessarily enough to cause a mental illness. Something else generally has to occur from the environment to make the inheritance of silent risk manifest as illness. That "something else" is often known as 'stress.'[96]

He then continues by introducing a variable that is even less quantifiable than stress in speaking of "personality." "To add another level of complexity to the situation, the net outcome of a stressor is determined to some extent by the personality of the person experiencing that stressor, not just the genes of that person."[97]

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[95]Ibid., 54-55.

[96]Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmachology*, 3rd ed., 185.

[97]Ibid., 190.

When the experts in the fields of neuroscience adopt the language of "stress" and "personality" it is a latent admission that the plethora of contributing factors to "mental health" are far beyond their own comprehension. While theories abound regarding the relationships between all of these contributing factors, the greatest advancement in the field of neuroscience continues to be in the appreciation for the complexity of the mind, which ought to inspire Christians both to greater worship of the creator as well as greater trust in his assertions regarding how the mind works and how change occurs.

**A genetic-matrix hypothesis.** As Christian psychologists have studied the biblical doctrine of sin more and more, they have progressed closer and closer to the perspective advocated all along by pastoral biblical theologians. Similarly, as neuroscientists have studied the brain and the mind more and more they have begun to progress towards theories that are more and more compatible with ageless biblical truth. For example, many neuroscientists and geneticists are beginning to move away from the hypothesis that there are single genes that cause problems in living.[98] Today, the most quickly developing theory is one that sees a multitude of different genes as providing certain propensities in people towards or away from certain problems in living. Stahl writes,

> So what is the pathway from gene to mental illness? The hypothesis is that mental illnesses are caused not by a single gene nor by a single subtle genetic abnormality but by multiple small contributions from several genes, all interacting with environmental stressors. This is sometimes called 'complex genetics,' for obvious reasons. It is not simple dominant or recessive genetics, but a complex set of risk factors that bias a person toward an illness but do not cause it.[99]

While there are obvious differences between the conclusions drawn from this hypothesis from a secular perspective and a Christian perspective (some of which have

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[98]Ibid., 178-94.

[99]Ibid., 185.

been identified above), the idea that a complex combination of genetic traits may predispose a person towards certain strengths and weaknesses is in no way incompatible with biblical truth.  In fact, it is something that ought to be expected as a result of the Fall.  In addition, this kind of genetic-matrix hypothesis sees genes (and even chemistry) as predisposing (not causing) problems in living, which keeps in tact the aspect of human ability both to spiral down into certain problems in living or spiral up out of them, depending on one's response.  Of course, this hypothesis does not take into account the power of the Spirit of God in a regenerate person's heart, but it can provide a scientific hypothesis that is closer to a biblical worldview than the deterministic genetic and chemical theories that have come before.

## Conclusion

Every person inside the church receives a diverse array of messages regarding how to conceptualize and treat the problems in living that plague so many lives.  Whether these messages are delivered through concerned friends, wise pastors, popular advertisements, or respected doctors, they seek to explain peoples' problems and provide hope for change.  As has been demonstrated, however, these messages are not all the same and ought not carry equal weight in the heart and mind of Christians.  While the insights of secular psychiatrists can be helpful in understanding the complexity of people and their problems, the way that psychiatry is popularly practiced ought to be viewed with great discernment and pursued with extreme caution.  Similarly, Christian psychologists provide helpful observations that may be underappreciated by biblical pastoral theologians; however, their conclusions regarding the nature of sin, change, and the gospel ought to be plainly rejected, and therefore their benefit for strugglers ought to be seen as extremely limited.  Conversely, while the conclusions of biblical pastoral theologians are by no means infallible, and still have significant room for further development, they are the source of professional wisdom that Christians ought to turn to

because of their fidelity to Scripture and their trust in the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY
RESEARCH PROJECT

It is upon the theological and professional research of the previous two

chapters that this ministry project has been developed.  While additional research was

required regarding the specific spiritual issues to be addressed, the biblical exegesis

presented in chapter two and the research of various professional perspectives presented

in chapter three provide the underpinning for all of the content presented in the ministry

project itself.  As was described in chapter one, the project took place over the course of

fifteen weeks from Sunday, September 4, 2011 to Sunday, December 11, 2011.

**Preparation and Questionnaires:**
**Two Weeks Prior to Class**

In preparation for the class, an invitation was sent out to a group of servant

ministers who had already completed the foundational ministry equipping classes that are

offered at Cornerstone.[1]  In response to this invitation, fourteen people committed to

being a part of this class.

The project officially began on September 4, 2011, when the pre-class

questionnaire (Appendix 1) was sent out to all participants.  Students were instructed to

complete the questionnaire and return it before the first day of class (September 18,

2011).  This questionnaire sought to measure five items: (1) the participant's knowledge

regarding the experience of the three spiritual issues to be addressed in class, (2) the

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[1]How to Study Your Bible, Your Place in God's Church, How People Change, and Living on Mission.

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participant's knowledge of the biblical nature of these spiritual issues, (3) the participant's knowledge of appropriate Scriptures that may be helpful to one struggling with these spiritual issues, (4) the participant's wisdom in ministering to one who is struggling with these spiritual issues, and (5) the participant's confidence in their own Spirit-empowered ability to walk with someone who is struggling with these spiritual issues.

In addition, it was during these two weeks that I sent out a reading schedule to the students. I asked the students to read three books over the course of the class, one on each of the spiritual issues addressed, so that the content covered in class could be complimented from other angles and perspectives. The three books that I assigned were: *Depression: A Stubborn* Darkness by Ed Welch,[2] *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ,* edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor,[3] and *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat* by Elyse Fitzpatrick.[4] Also during this time, the focus group (a three-person subset of the class) was selected in order to evaluate my teaching and help me identify ways to enhance student learning, involvement, and engagement.

## Review of Basic Biblical Principles:
## Class Week 1

The first week of class consisted of a review of the biblical principles of personal change and ministry methodology. The principles covered were all topics that the students had been introduced to in previous classes, but the foundational nature of these principles required that they be revisited and reaffirmed. This review began with a discussion on the biblical methodology for mutual personal ministry.

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[2]Edward T. Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2004).

[3]John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

[4]Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999).

**The Biblical Methodology
for Personal Ministry**

Students were reminded how simple the biblical methodology for personal ministry is. They were reminded that all ministry can essentially be summed up in two commandments: love God, and love people. Of course, these commandments have innumerable implications, but Scripture repeatedly affirms that love is at the center of our call in ministry. It is seen throughout the New Testament that love summarizes all God's commandments (Rom 13:8-10), love unifies all that beleivers are instructed to do (Col 3:12-14), and that without love, the greatest obedience is worthless (1 Cor 13:1-3).

All of the "one-anothers" in Scripture are seen to be manifestations of love. For the purposes of training, I summarized these manifestations into fourteen different words or phrases, organized into four overarching categories. These four categories (Lovingly Knowing, Lovingly Serving, Lovingly Speaking, and Lovingly Training in Righteousness) are summarized in the following visual representation (Fig. 1).

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                          ┌──────────────┐
                          │     Love     │
                          └──────┬───────┘
         ┌───────────────┬───────┴───────┬───────────────┐
   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐
   │  Knowing  │   │  Serving  │   │ Speaking  │   │ Training  │
   └─────┬─────┘   └─────┬─────┘   └─────┬─────┘   └─────┬─────┘
   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐   ┌─────┴──────┐
   │ Listening │   │  Praying  │   │Giving Hope│   │ Identifying│
   │Interpreting│  │ Pursuing  │   │ Affirming │   │Self-Worship│
   │Considering│   │  Sharing  │   │Confronting│   │Reminding of│
   └───────────┘   │  Bearing  │   └───────────┘   │ Indicatives│
                   │ Forgiving │                    │Instructing │
                   └───────────┘                    │in          │
                                                     │Imperatives │
                                                     └────────────┘
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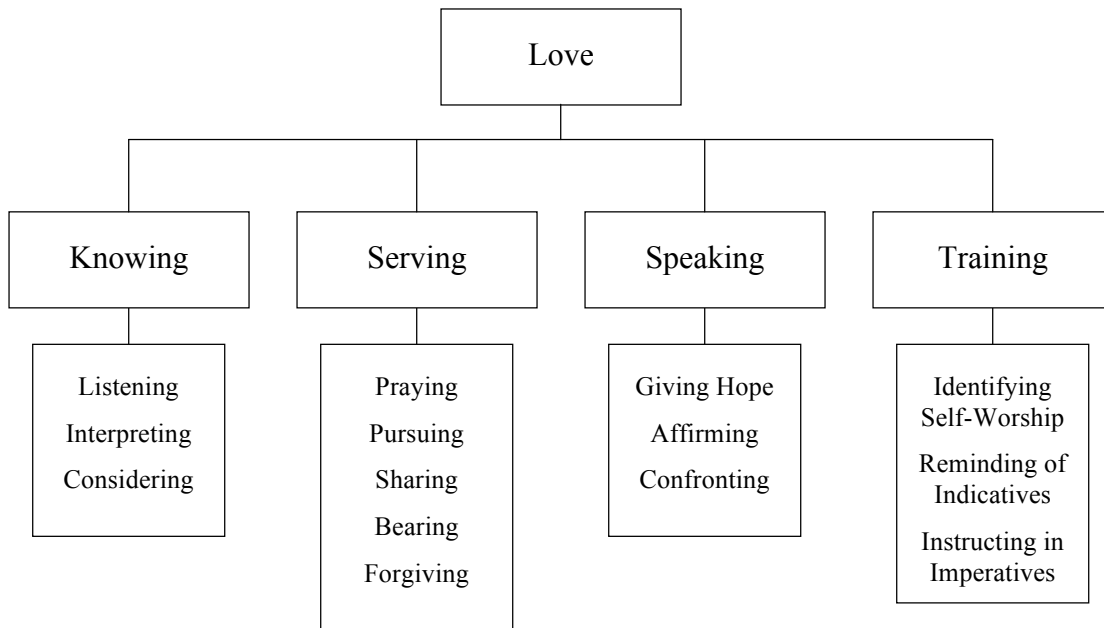
Figure 1.  Personal ministry methodology

This visual representation provides an outline for our personal ministry to others, and also provides the outline for the "Truthing in Love" portions of this class. The second collection of biblical principles that were reviewed during this class session concerned the relationship between sin and suffering, and the dynamics of the human heart.

**Sin, Suffering, and the Heart**

The centrality of the heart was reaffirmed during this class, and students were reminded that biblical sanctification and change does not take place by simply "stopping sin" and "doing what is right," but that true biblical sanctification involves "putting off" the old self, being renewed in one's mind by the truth of the gospel, and "putting on" the new self.

We also discussed the relationship between sin and suffering in the heart of the Christian. Suffering may provide the opportunity for an emotional reaction (either appropriate or sinful), but our reactions are always, most fundamentally, caused by our hearts. As David Powlison writes,

> Biblically comprehending man-as-sufferer is never meant to answer 'Why do I sin?' It does answer 'When? Where? With whom? Under whose influence?' It describes the situation in which one is tempted and tried. With new eyes, the situation of suffering becomes the 'when, where, with whom and against what' within which he will learn faith and obedience.[5]

For the sake of this class, the relationship between sin and suffering was conceptualized by using the following diagram, recognizing the undeniable effect suffering has on our hearts and our behavior, thoughts, and emotions; as well as the undeniable effects our behavior, thoughts, and emotions have on one another; all the while recognizing the fundamental causal relationship between our hearts and our behavior, thoughts, and emotions (see Figure 2).

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[5]David Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," *JBC* 9, no. 3 (1988): 63.
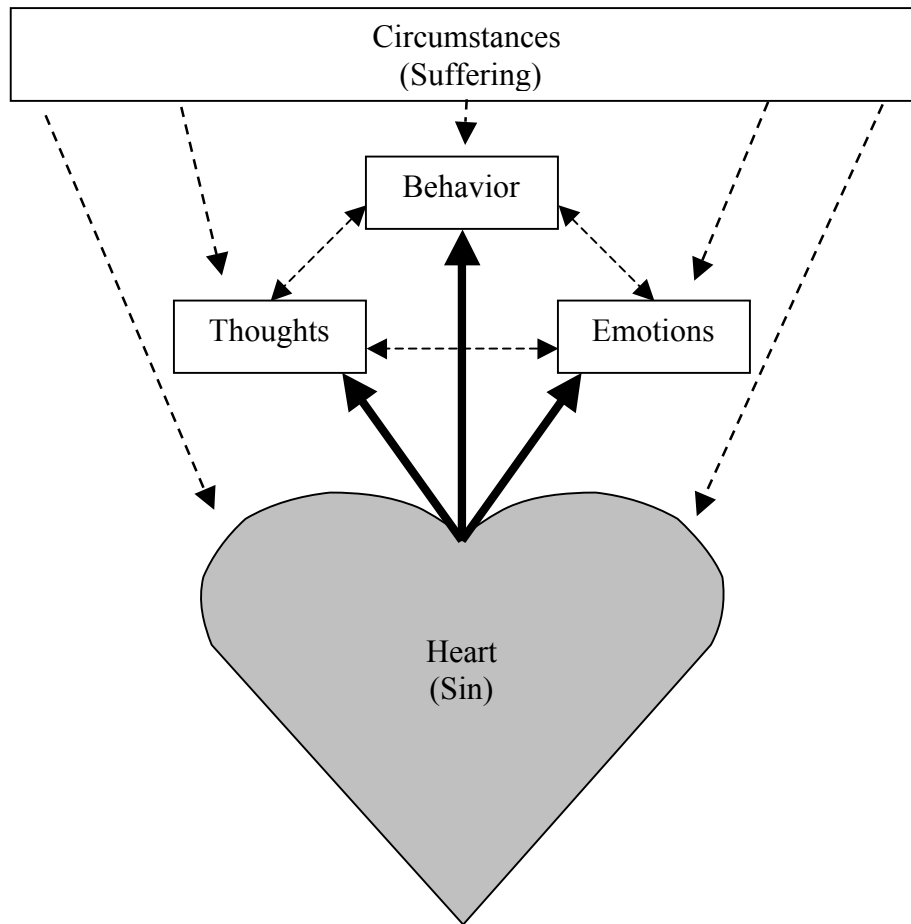
Figure 2.  Relationship between sin and suffering

The class also included a brief discussion on the relationship between idolatry

in the heart and its ultimate root cause: self-worship.  In order to fully understand sin, and

its multitude of manifestations, one must understand the idolatry that causes it.  However,

the idolatry that is at the root of our sin is not simply one of a diverse list of idolatrous

desires (i.e., control, money, power, comfort, etc.), but is ultimately the idolatry of "self"

which has replaced our worship of God.  Students were reminded that the numerous

different "idols" we can identify in our lives are ultimately all unique manifestations of

self-worship.

<center>**The Gospel and Depression:**
**Class Weeks 2-4**</center>

The first spiritual issue that we addressed in class was depression.  We spent the first week "listening" to the personal and cultural experience of depression so that students would gain an appreciation for what someone who struggles with depression experiences.  The second week we discussed the biblical nature of depression, looking at how depression is brought on and caused by both suffering and sin, as well as demonstrating how the gospel and truth of Scripture are sufficient to address the problem of depression.  The third week we sought to apply the truth we had learned by discussing how we might minister to someone who is depressed using the framework of the previously provided methodology for personal ministry.

**Listening to Depression**

**The personal experience of depression.**  Our first class session on depression[6] began with students evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions of depression provided by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR).[7]  The conclusion that was drawn was that one cannot hope to understand depression by simply trying to define it.  Depression is an incredibly vague term that is used to categorize a whole host of diverse symptoms.  As such, the DSM-IV oftentimes proves to be more harmful than it is helpful in understanding people's problems, for it takes biblically identifiable emotions and symptoms and gives them a general, unsubstantiated, and non-biblical label.

As a result of understanding depression in this general way, students were encouraged to see depression not as an identifiable disease, but to instead liken it to a

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[6]The class notes from this class session are provided in Appendix 2.

[7]American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* 4th ed. Text Revision (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

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fever which helps the sufferer identify that something is wrong, but cannot, alone, lead to

a determinative conclusion regarding what exactly the problem is. Robert Carson, a

secular psychiatrist at Duke University, was the source for this fever analogy.

> A concrete example of the implausibility of the conjunctive category ideal in this field is provided in the widespread occurrence of high levels of anxiety and depression as central features across the entire domain of psychopathology, as well as their frequent co-occurrence in individual cases of disorder…These manifestations appear to share a status not unlike that of fever in general medicine, rather than being, in themselves, categories of disorder, as the DSM would have it.[8]

> As a result of the implausibility of understanding depression by simply

defining it, students were then encouraged to begin to understand the struggle of

depression by listening to the descriptions of those who have struggled with it. As Ed

Welch encourages,

> Don't assume that you understand what someone means by 'depression.' Don't fill in the meaning from your own experience, which may or may not be similar. Instead, listen. Allow the depressed person to fill the word depression with the meaning it has for him or her.[9]

In order to facilitate and practice this kind of "listening," we read through four different

accounts of depression[10] and noted the "symptoms" that each sufferer was reporting (i.e.

hopelessness, guilt, shame, sorrow, etc.). This exercise helped students to see how

diverse the issue of depression is, how the component parts are actually symptoms that

Scripture speaks to, and also gave them practice in listening to the pain and experience of

someone else.

> In addition to the personal experience of depression, it is also imperative that

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[8]Robert C. Carson, "Costly Compromises: A Critique of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," in *From Placebo to Panacea*, ed. Seymour Fisher and Roger P Greenberg (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 105.

[9]Edward T. Welch, *Blame it on the Brain* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 117.

[10]This included excerpts from Ps 42; Edward T. Welch, *Depression*; Charles Hodges, "Spiritual Depression: A Case of 'Myth Diagnosis'?" *The Journal of Modern* Ministry 2:1 (2005): 161-74; Edward T. Welch, "Depression's Odd Filter" [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2011; available from http://www.ccef.org/depression's-odd-filter; Internet.

students understand the cultural experience that shapes that personal experience. People do not suffer in a vacuum, but in a cultural context or "Vanity Fair."[11] For this reason, we spent time examining the cultural experience of depression as well.

**The cultural experience of depression in the world.** There are innumerable aspects of the culture in which we live that influence how people experience depression. The first two aspects that we discussed in this class were the "normalcy" and the "mystery" of depression. In short, we discussed the experiential impact of the fact that depression is so common in our culture,[12] and yet there is such an incredible lack of understanding regarding its nature and cause. For all of the money, resources, and interest that depression has garnered, a simple cure or identifiable cause still does not exist.

The third cultural aspect that we considered in class was the culturally accepted theory of chemical imbalance. The reigning cultural theory regarding the cause and incidence of depression is that it is caused by a chemical imbalance within the brain.[13] This theory pervades popular culture as well as the church, and is a fairly accepted "fact" in American culture.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the current research in neuroscience and psychopharmacology suggests that there is great complexity in the human brain, and that even the most accomplished neuroscientists cannot simplify its processes. In fact, current research not only brings into doubt the possibility of a simple

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[11]David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," *JBC* 13:2 (1995): 35-50.

[12] "According to the latest research, about one in four Americans – over seventy million people – will meet the criteria for major depression at some point in their lives" (Stephen Ilardi, *The Depression Cure* [Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2009], 4).

[13]Robert D. Smith, *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 195-98. The pervasiveness of this cultural theory is also demonstrated by the prolific way in which anti-depressant medications are currently being prescribed. Mark Olfson and Steven Marcus, "National Patterns in Antidepressant Medication Treatment," *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 66:8 (2009): 848-56.

"chemical imbalance" theory, but rejects it outright.[14]

Students were confronted with this research, and we discussed how this information ought to impact our ministry to others who struggle with depression. We discussed how this information ought to give us great confidence in identifying depression as a spiritual issue (with possible physical contributors) and not simply a chemical one. Students were also exhorted to *not* use this information to counsel others off of medication, because they lack fully-orbed medical knowledge and expertise and must always instruct counselees to make medication decisions in concert with their personal physician.

**The cultural experience of depression in the church.** The first week on the topic of depression ended with a brief discussion of how depression is experienced within the cultural context of the church. Unfortunately, the mystery of depression in the culture at large is reflected in the church as well. This oftentimes results in Christians not knowing how to minister to their brothers or sisters when they are depressed. One of the consequences of this ignorance is that Christians can oftentimes offer simplistic explanations and solutions to depression. The depressed person might be instructed to identify the sin that is causing their depression, or to simply "have more faith." In addition, there are many well-known biblical "truths" (or "half-truths" to be more accurate) that can shape the experience of depression for someone who is a part of the church.[15] All of these different angles were tackled in an attempt to help students understand the experience of depression. In our second week on this topic we began to interpret this experience in light of Scripture and identify the biblical nature of the ailments that are generally categorized as "depression."

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[14]Stephen M. Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmacology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102; Irving Kirsch, *The Emperor's New Drugs* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

[15]Examples include "Christians are supposed to be 'happy'" (Jas 1:2), "Christians aren't supposed to despair" (2 Cor 4:8-9), or "Christians are supposed to be able to do 'all things' (Phil 4:13).

**The Biblical Nature of Depression**

   The second class session on the topic of depression consisted of a survey look at the biblical nature of depression. Using the categories of suffering and sin, we discussed how depression is caused by both of these realities, and then looked at how the gospel ministers to the depressed as they suffer and as they sin. Ultimately, debilitating depression is caused by a downward spiral consisting of painful circumstances and subsequent responses, and so it is important to understand and minister to both.

   **Depression is caused by suffering.** This class session began by looking at all of the different ways in which humans suffer, contributing to depression. In many ways, a depressed mood can be an appropriate response to the reality of life in a fallen world. Humans suffer because of their fallen bodies. There are many medical conditions that have depressing effects, and even simply being physically ill can cause a person to feel "down." In addition, death is one of the greatest causes of depression, especially when it touches someone close to you. Our fallen environment is another cause of suffering, whether it be natural disasters, the finitude of resources, or even the difficulty of provision and work (Gen 3:17-19). Similarly, every culture has its own unique impact on those within it, and the modern western culture is no exception. People suffer immensely and depression is often fueled as a result of living in our individualistic, happiness-focused, entertainment-driven culture.

   Of course, Satan is another undeniable source of depression inducing suffering, as well as the plethora of ways in which others sin against us. Every time one is wronged, God provides a way to address that sin through forgiveness, but that does not mean that being wronged is not incredibly painful and cannot be the source of a depressed mood. In the context of the class, this survey led students to appreciate the multitude of factors that can lead someone to feel depressed, and to increase their compassion for the fact that a "depressed mood" is not always an inappropriate or sin-

induced reality.

**Depression is caused by sin.** Depression is also caused by our sinful responses to suffering. Sinful responses to suffering do not only include externally sinful actions in response to suffering, but internally sinful interpretations of suffering as well. Our response to suffering always portrays the depths of our heart. When one treasures, focuses on, and loves something other than Christ, it is made readily apparent by their response to suffering.

In addition, depression can stem simply from the latent sin in our hearts. For example, when we are motivated by the fear of man, we will always end up depressed because others will inevitably fail us and we will always fail to live up to others' expectations. Unresolved and ungodly guilt can also lead us into depression. We experience *unresolved* guilt when we are living in some sort of unrepentant sin, which ought to lead us to confession and repentance. We experience *ungodly* guilt when we are weighed down by guilt for an action that either (1) is not forbidden or required by God, or (2) we have been forgiven for, and have simply not internalized that which God has already asserted to be true. Similar to the latter, hopelessness is a major component of depression that feeds further pain. However, God tells us that suffering produces hope (Rom 5:2-4). Therefore, we ought to understand hopelessness not as a natural product of suffering, but instead as sinful unbelief. Suffering that does not ultimately produce hope cannot be devoid of sin.

**The gospel and suffering.** In recognizing the depths of suffering that contribute to depression, it can be tempting for a Christian to be discouraged. However, God has demonstrated throughout the New Testament how powerfully the gospel ministers to those who are depressed as a result of their suffering. Those who suffer are repeatedly called to rejoice in the midst of their sufferings, but this is not an empty command. This joy is meant to spring from the truth of the gospel. It is for this reason

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that the second half of this session began with the class walking through three passages: James 1:2-4, 12-14; 1 Peter 1:3-7; and Romans 5:2-4. In these three passages, exactly how the gospel ministers to those who suffer, and consequently inspires joy, was examined and applied to the issues of depression.

**The gospel and sin.** Similarly, many may find the identification of sin as a cause of depression disheartening; however, this is one of the most hopeful realizations imaginable. If depression were caused by problematic brain chemistry, there would be no hope for an ultimate solution. However, since depression is caused, at least in part, by our sin, there ought to be great encouragement since we have been given a remedy for sin in the death and resurrection of Christ. To this end, this class session concluded with an examination of Colossians 3:1-14, rooted in the gospel-truth asserted in Colossians 2:13-15. From this passage, students were given three instructions for addressing sin in the life of the depressed person. First, the depressed person ought to be called to set their mind on things that are above (Col 3:1-4) and helped toward that end. This could include anything from writing Scripture on index cards to helping the depressed person find ways to affirm biblical truth throughout the day and week. Second the depressed person ought to be called to put to death the idolatry in their heart (Col 3:5-12), namely the self-worship that is fueling and feeding their depression. Finally, the depressed person ought to be called to put on Christlikeness (Col 3:13-14) even in the midst of suffering.

**"Truthing" the Depressed in Love**

As was mentioned in chapter two of this project, Paul's instruction to "speak the truth in love" carries with it the importance of both words and actions. For this reason, Paul literally instructs the Ephesian church to be "truthing" one another in love.[16] The application of this truth takes many forms, which made up the content of our third

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[16]See exegesis on p. 26 of this project.

week on depression.

**Serving in love.**  We first looked at the ways in which a depressed person would need to be served in the midst of their struggle.  This conversation began on the topic of prayer, affirming the fact that counsel that is not accompanied by prayer cannot be considered biblical counsel.  If peace and joy are fruits of the Spirit, and not simply emotions that can be drawn out by good counseling, then we must depend firmly on the Spirit to grow those fruits in the heart of the person we are ministering to, and we must entreat the Spirit to do this work through prayer.  Secondly, we discussed the need for a depressed person to be pursued.  Someone who has no desire to get out of bed, go to work, or even spend time with friends will rarely make the effort to spend time with, or reach out to, those friends who could help them.

In addition, we discussed the fact that ministering to someone who is depressed will oftentimes require the sacrificial giving of time.  People who are hopeless, discouraged, and immobile do not tend to return to "normal life" quickly, and oftentimes require a great deal of patience and sacrificial time from those ministering to them.  This led us to the final two acts of service that were discussed: bearing and forgiving.  When ministering to someone who is depressed, a significant amount of bearing with them through frustrations and annoyances will be required.  But, this is the very point at which love is so often communicated in a uniquely powerful way.  As Ed Welch writes,

> Sometimes you will grow weary in loving.  We all do.  You will genuinely love, but it will seem fruitless or irrelevant.  It won't seem to matter to the depressed person.  But know this; your love makes a difference.  That doesn't mean that one concerted push to love will snap anyone out of depression.  By itself, your love will not change anyone. . . . But depressed people, like all of us, are aware of kindness and love that is willing to sacrifice.  Love always leaves its mark.[17]

In addition, forgiveness will inevitably be required.  Someone who is wrestling through depression will almost always sin against those around them, and when that happens (and

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[17]Welch, *Depression*, 221-22.

it ought to be expected to happen) forgiveness is the means God has provided for reconciliation to take place.

**Speaking in love.** In addition to truth being manifest through the actions specified above, we next discussed how truth must also be spoken into the life of the one struggling with depression. It is the reminder of truth, in the context of that truth being embodied, that will open up the eyes of the depressed to the spiritual reality that has somehow been forgotten. The first application of truth that ought to be spoken is particularly important for those who are depressed, and that is regarding the issue of hope. Even for those who feel hopeless, we ought to affirm that there *is* hope and that God's promises provide a great source of hope. As Robert Smith exhorts, "If you are working with a depressed person, hope should ooze out of every part of your counseling because of God's promises."[18] Even if the depressed person does not have hope, we must have hope for them and assert that hope into every part of our actions and speech.

The second aspect of speech that was discussed in class was that of affirming the depressed person for the godly thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that we recognize in the midst of their struggle. When a person is depressed, all they can see is the negative evidence in their life, but one of our jobs, as counselors, is to point out the truth regarding the work that God is doing, whether they can see it or not.

On the flip side, we examined how the depressed person must also be lovingly confronted regarding their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that do not spring from the godliness in their heart, and manifest by either asserting untruths or manifesting blatant sin. When the depressed person is believing lies, it is fundamentally important that those lies be confronted.

**Training in love.** Finally, we considered the fact that love is not godly in

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[18]Smith, *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference*, 209.

nature unless it culminates in "training in righteousness."  First of all, this is because God

desires more of our ministry than simply symptom relief.  He desires for God-glorifying

sanctification to be the ultimate goal of our ministry to one another.  Secondly, any

change that takes place apart from gospel-motivated sanctification is only temporary at

best, and deceiving at worst.  Elyse Fitzpatrick comments powerfully on this point:

> Since our feelings are a by-product of our inner person, we won't be able to change
> them directly.  There is just no sense in telling ourselves to be happy when we feel
> sad, or to love when all we feel is disgust.  The only way that we can change our
> feelings is by changing our core beliefs and the thoughts that occupy our minds.  As
> we learned earlier, we need to be 'transformed by the renewal of our mind' (Rom.
> 12:2).[19]

This renewal of the mind takes place through three ordered components, which were

discussed in class, namely, identifying self-worship, reminding of gospel-truths, and

instructing in gospel-commands.

The exhortation to identify self-worship was given to help the depressed see

the aspects of their depression that are manifestations of self-worship that they may be

led to repentance.  This repentance, however, is never meant to be an empty command,

but ought to be inspired by reminding the depressed person of gospel-truths.  By doing

this, the depressed person is reminded of spiritual reality, and the truth regarding all that

God has done for them in Christ is brought to the forefront to be meditated upon.  In the

context of the class, we did this by identifying the gospel-truths expressed in passages

like Colossians 2:8-15, Ephesians 1:3-14, and 1 Peter 1:3-5.

The class concluded by looking at the gospel-commands that the depressed

person ought to be instructed in, in response to the truth of the gospel.  While obedience

to these commands may begin with small steps such as getting out of bed, or going to

work, they all ought to find their culmination in calling the depressed person to manifest

their love of God and love of others.  Loving others can be particularly difficult for a

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[19]Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis Johnson, *Counsel from the Cross* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway
Books, 2009), 140.

depressed person, but depression is not an excuse to rebuff the gospel-motivated obedience that God calls for. In order to tie these commands back directly to the gospel-truths that are meant to inspire them, we looked at instructions and commands from the same letters that we looked at above, namely, Colossians 3:1-14, Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32, and 1 Peter 1:6-9, 14-16.

This brought to a culmination our discussion on depression as we looked forward to the following week when we would begin examining sexual issues and repeat the same three-week structure.

### The Gospel and Sexual Issues:
### Class Weeks 5-7

The second spiritual issue that was addressed was a general category of spiritual issues, similar in generality to the category of issues labeled depression. This category included pornography, individual masturbation, fantasies, fetishes, same-sex attraction, adultery, impotence, frigidity, and lust, and was simply labeled "sexual issues." We began the first class session with a review of the biblical nature of sex, which many of the students had covered previously in other equipping settings. Students were briefly reminded of the three fundamental purposes of sex: (1) sex is a means of covenantal union, (2) sex is an expression of the marital relationship, and (3) sex is an expression of the relationship between Christ and the church.

We then spent the rest of the class session "listening" to the personal and cultural experience of sexual issues, as had been done with depression. The second week on this topic we discussed the biblical nature of sexual issues, looking at how sexual issues involve contributing factors of both suffering and sin, as well as demonstrating how the gospel and truth of Scripture are sufficient to address those issues. And, the third week was spent seeking to apply the truth we had learned by discussing how we might minister to someone who is struggling with sexual issues using the framework of the

previously provided methodology for personal ministry.

**Listening to Sexual Issues**

          **The personal experience of sexual issues.**  After defining and describing each of the different sexual issues above, the class spent time discussing the personal experience of these issues, and the common aspects that those who struggle sexually experience.  First, we discussed the fact that sexual issues feel innate, and therefore can seem like an identity to the one experiencing them.  Sexual sin almost always feels extremely "natural" and as a result is often deeply ingrained in the self-identity of the struggler.  In addition, sexual issues oftentimes feel like enslavement.  This comes as a result of the overwhelmingly powerful nature of sexuality, and greatly shapes the experience of sexual issues.  As a result of this feeling of enslavement, many Christians feel like their struggle with sexual issues is hopeless.  Whether the problem is pornography, lust, or same-sex attraction, hopelessness is an extremely common experience for those who struggle sexually.

          We also discussed the significant experience of shame that accompanies sexual issues in the life of a believer.  Because of their blatantly sinful nature, most sexual issues also produce feelings of guilt and shame.  While this ought to be expected given the conscience of a new creation in Christ, the fact that sexual strugglers often feel "weighed down" and "dirty" continues to reinforce many of the lies that contribute to sexual sin in the first place.  As a result of all of these aspects, we discussed the fact that while providing instant gratification, sexual issues feel painful in the long run.  And, not only do they feel painful, but they can be the fruit of significant pain as well.

          This discussion of the pain of sexual sin led to a conversation on the personal history of sexual problems.  Sexual issues never come out of the blue.  Consequently, understanding a person's history with sexual issues and the multiple variables that have contributed to their current struggle can help to provide invaluable insight as we walk

with someone through this struggle.  This history will inevitably involve past sin as well as past influences both from the world and the church.

**The cultural experience of sexual issues in the world.**  Our modern culture only enflames the Christian's struggle with sexual issues.  Both the normalcy and the promotion of the diverse sexual issues listed above contribute greatly to shaping how Christians view and conceptualize their struggles.  What God calls "rebellion" the world calls "fun" at best and "a fundamental need" at worst.  As a result, one cannot walk through a city, flip through television channels, or surf the internet without being bombarded by both subtle and overt sexual images and ideas.  This experience ought to be taken into consideration as we minister to those who are struggling sexually and therefore swimming firmly upstream.

In addition to the general sexualizing of our culture, there are also additional cultural aspects that significantly influence the experience of sexual issues.  First, we discussed the culturally accepted theory of genetic causation in regards to sexual orientation.  Although the scientific research does not support the hypothesis, the general assumption in our culture is that sexual orientation is truly innate and genetically pre-determined.[20]  While this cultural assumption may not be a view held inside the church, the fact that it is such a widely accepted "fact" in the larger culture greatly shapes the experience of those who struggle with same-sex attraction.

Similarly, while the theory of genetic causation shapes the experience for those with same-sex attraction, the theory of addiction greatly shapes the experience of those who struggle with many other sexual issues.  Probably the most culturally prevalent way to speak of sexual issues is as an addiction.[21]  The problematic nature of addiction

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[20]Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).

[21]For example, Chris Lee, "This Man is Addicted to Sex: Inside an Epidemic," *Newsweek*, 5 December 2011, 48-55.

language is that it carries with it a disease metaphor that has lost many of its metaphorical qualities and has hardened into a perceived reality. Addictions aren't talked about in comparison to a disease, but instead as a disease themselves.[22] This has a significant shaping influence on the way in which sexual issues are conceptualized even within the church, and ought it to be recognized and biblically addressed.

**The cultural experience of sexual issues in the church.** In addition to gaining an appreciation for the experience of sexual issues in light of the broader, secular culture, we also discussed the implications of the church's culture on those who struggle sexually. One of the greatest ways in which church culture shapes the experience of sexual strugglers is by a subtle but widely acknowledged stratifying of sexual sin. Sexual sin oftentimes gets ranked from the generally acceptable to the perverted. Because of this stratification, those who struggle with more "acceptable" forms of sexual sin feel as though they cannot relate to the struggles of those whom they deem more "perverted," and those who struggle in ways deemed "perverted" oftentimes struggle in silence because of their shame.

The class session finished with a brief look at the impact of psychologized Christian solutions on the experience of those who struggle sexually. Living in a highly psychologized culture, many Christians see licensed therapists as the first place to turn when experiencing problems in living.[23] Unfortunately, these licensed therapists, even if they are Christian, have usually been trained in secular theories and practices and offer surface level interventions that are ultimately devoid of the gospel.[24] Because this gospel-less "ministry" is passed off as Christian, many in the church may come to believe

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[22] Edward T. Welch, *Addiction: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 45-47.

[23] David Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 42.

[24] See section on Integrative Christian Psychologists in the previous chapter.

that they have sufficiently addressed their sexual issues while their heart remains

unchanged, and the gospel remains unapplied.  This can cause great confusion in the life

of a believer who thinks he has addressed his sexual issues, but who continues to struggle

and repeatedly falls into temptation over the long run.  This, again, leads us to the

importance of understanding sexual issues from a biblical perspective.

**The Biblical Nature of Sexual Issues**

The second class session on the topic of sexual issues took on the question of

the biblical nature of sexual issues.[25]  This section contained the most overlap from our

earlier discussion on depression.  This is because one of the goals of this class is to

identify the similar nature of all of peoples' problems in living, rooted essentially in a

mixture of suffering and sin, and to demonstrate the power of the gospel to address those

problems, regardless of how diverse they may seem.

This session began with a review of the relationship between circumstances

and the heart.[26]  This discussion involved a more in-depth look at how our heart manifests

itself into our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions through our desires.[27]  To illustrate this

point, we discussed Tim Stafford's excellent comment on the relationship between sexual

lust and desire.

> In English the word lust generally connotes lurid sexual fantasies. It is closely
> associated with the mental pictures of naked bodies to which males are so typically
> drawn.  This English meaning of lust, however has no equivalent word in New
> Testament Greek. The word translated lust in Matthew 5:28 (*epithumia*) means
> simply *desire* . . . . The same Greek word is used to render the Hebrew word
> translated *covet* as in, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant
> or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor"
> (Exodus 20:17, NIV). Here we strike at the heart of the problem of lust as the Bible
> conceives it: We want things that don't belong to us. Leave sex out of it entirely for

[25]The class notes from this class session are provided in Appendix 3.

[26]See Figure 2 on p. 92.

[27]Cf. Jas 1:14-15; 2 Pet 1:3-4; Eph 4:20-24.

the moment. We are not content with what we have. We want something more—and that desire drives us.[28]

This appreciation for the central role desire plays in determining the specific manifestations of our self-worship was also presented to the students visually (see Fig. 3), in order to help them conceptualize just how our worshipping heart and our desires relate to our sexual thoughts and behaviors.  Of course, it is also of great importance to acknowledge the role external influences play in our sexual issues, and so, after this brief, general review, the class' attention was turned towards identifying the forms of suffering that contribute to sexual issues.
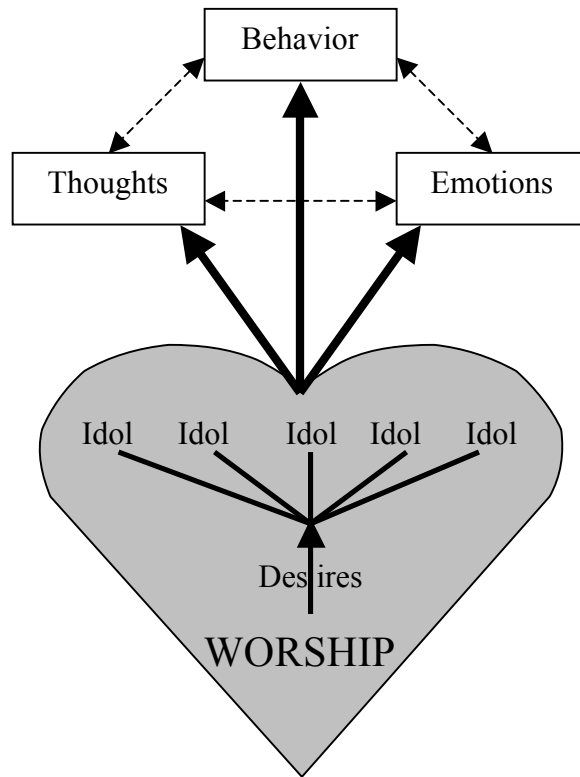
Figure 3.  Worship and desire in the heart

[28]Tim Stafford, "Getting Serious About Lust in an Age of Smirks," *JBC* 13:3 (1995): 4-5.

**Sexual issues are caused by suffering.** The class briefly examined four general areas in which we suffer that contribute to sexual issues. First, we suffer sexually because of our fallen bodies. Human sexuality is drastically marred from birth because of original sin (Gen 3:6-7), and is a significant contributing form of suffering.[29] Secondly, as was discussed in depth in the previous section, we suffer as a result of living in a fallen culture.

We also suffer significantly at the hands of Satan. While Satan may not possess believers, he does often play the role of "counselor," encouraging and affirming the lies that we are tempted to believe in regards to our sexuality. Finally, we also significantly suffer at the hands of others when they sin against us. Suffering at the hands of others that impacts our sexuality can take many different forms. We can suffer from others' subtle, non-sexual sin such as parental neglect; we can suffer from others' subtle, sexual sin such as when a seven-year-old is handed pornography from a friend; we can suffer from others' blatant sexual sin such as molestation or rape. But, regardless of the form, suffering can have a significant impact on one's sexuality and contribute powerfully to sexual issues.

**Sexual issues are caused by sin.** Of course, sexual issues, the vast majority of which are sinful in and of themselves,[30] are also ultimately caused by sinful desires, both erotic and platonic. The erotic sinful desires involved are obvious and cause sexual issues when they are given priority over God's expressed design and desire for our sexuality. However, there are also numerous non-sexual sinful heart issues that contribute to sexual sin. Four examples identified in class are: anger, the pursuit of affection, distorted messianic desires, and the pursuit of relief and rest. All of these sinful

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[29]The simple fact that our sexuality is fallen from birth and that we are predisposed to sexual selfishness and deviance, even in childhood, can be a significant cause of suffering.

[30]Examples of sexual issues that may not be sinful in and of themselves would include problems such as impotence or frigidity.

responses or pursuits are similarly rooted in one's self-worshipping desires and can

manifest themselves sexually. Summarizing the non-erotic sinful contributors to sexual

sin, Alan Medinger writes,

> I have seen two sinful attitudes creep into strugglers that precede giving in to
> lust; two voices, if you will. One says, "I deserve something." The other says, "I
> shouldn't have to go through this." The names of the two voices are pride and self-
> pity. They are the antithesis of a grateful heart.[31]

**The gospel and suffering.** Just as we had done three weeks prior in our

discussion on depression, we again looked at how Christ, in the gospel, instructs us to

view and understand our suffering by looking at James 1:2-4, 12-14; 1 Peter 1:3-7; and

Romans 5:2-4. Concerning suffering that impacts our sexuality, this discussion was

particularly powerful in light of these passages' assertion that God will redeem the ways

in which our sexuality has been marred by the culture, by Satan, and by others. In fact,

God calls us to consider these trials "joy" because of the ways in which he plans to use

them and redeem them, producing endurance, character, and hope through them.

**The gospel and sin.** In light of the grace of God, the gospel of Christ declares

one thing loud and clear in regards to sexual sin: "change is possible…and expected!"

As we discussed earlier, sexual issues can feel hopeless and enslaving. However, in

Christ, God declares that we are made alive, forgiven, and set free.

To this end, the class looked, again, at Colossians 2:13-15 as a meditation upon

our identity in Christ, and we, again, turned to Colossians 3:1-14 for practical instructions

in how to address the sin that causes sexual issues and habitual outward sexual sin. The

class then applied the three instructions from this passage specifically to the issues of

sexual sin.

First, the believer is called to "set your mind on the things that are above."

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[31]Alan Medinger, "Queries and Controversies: Why Are Struggles with Sexual Temptation Stronger at Some Times Than at Others?" *JBC* 16:2 (1998): 62.

Instead of filling our heads with sexualized content and meditating constantly on that content, we are called to "renew our minds" (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23) by meditating upon eternal reality. Secondly, the believer is called to "put to death what is earthly." In applying this instruction, our biblical understanding of the nature of sexual issues leads us to not *only* put to death sinful sexual actions (i.e. looking at pornography, individual masturbation, etc.), but *also* to put to death the idolatry and covetousness that motivates them. And, thirdly, following up the mortification of those sinful desires, we are called to put on Christ-like love. The opposite of sexual objectification is Christ-like love manifest to all of those around us of either gender. As was discussed in class, these instructions are the blueprint for the long-term battle against sexual sin. As Christians, on this side of heaven, we will never graduate from Colossians 3:1-14, but ought to spend our entire lives continuing to pursue these three simple, basic, yet incredibly powerful instructions.

**"Truthing" Sexual Strugglers in Love**

Just as the application of truth requires great wisdom, care, and compassion when ministering to someone who is depressed, ministry to a sexual struggler requires an equal manifestation of love. Those who are struggling sexually need to be known and understood, as was examined in the previous two sections. In addition, sexual strugglers also require service, speech, and training in righteousness.

**Serving in love.** Echoing the previously examined outline, the class began its third session on sexual issues by discussing the ways in which love ought to manifest in service towards the sexual struggler. This began with a focus on the primary significance of prayer in addressing sexual issues. In addition, we discussed the necessity of pursuit in our relationship with those who are struggling sexually. Because of the nature of sexual sin, it is very often accompanied by shame and hiding. Therefore, we ought to pursue those we are ministering to in order to provide both accountability and deep

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loving care. We also examined the need for the sharing of time and resources with those who are struggling sexually. It may, at times, be necessary to help remove someone from a tempting situation, which may require as little as a short phone call or as much as a place to stay.

Of course, we are also called to bear with people as they struggle sexually, and regarding this particular issue, this brought up a question regarding the difference between bearing with someone and enabling them. How long can we bear with someone's sexual sin before we become part of the problem? While there is no simple answer to a wisdom-based question like this, the one clear demarcation that was made in the class was that bearing and enabling can be differentiated by clear repentance. The immediate goal may not be perfection (as with every sinful area of our lives), but we ought to expect (and even demand) clear fruit of repentance and growth in righteousness, all the while exhibiting a great deal of loving patience (1 Thes 5:14).

Finally, we discussed the importance of forgiving someone who struggles with sexual sin, especially when his or her sin directly impacts you (i.e. if you are the spouse of the struggler). Forgiveness is not optional for the Christian, and so we tackled many questions regarding how this ought to be expressed towards a repentant fellow Christian who has struggled sexually. This also tied into questions regarding the extent of confession required when sexual sin has taken place, which we briefly touched on, looking to 2 Samuel 11:2-5 as an example of a clear, yet constrained, description.

**Speaking in love.** Of course, ministry to someone who is struggling sexually involves much more than simply serving them; words of truth must be spoken to them as well. We looked at the importance of giving hope to the sexual struggler as well as the importance of affirming those aspects of their life and sexuality that *are* conforming to the image of Christ. No matter how discouraged they feel in their struggle, if they are a new creation in Christ there is hope for transformation and God is empowering them to

that end.  Similarly, if the Spirit of God is working in them, there will inevitably be evidence of repentance in their life that ought to be affirmed and encouraged. However, this hope and encouragement should never overshadow the importance of clear, courageous confrontation when sexual sin has not been confessed or repented of. Sexual sin is uniquely powerful and damaging, and confrontation ought never be neglected.  Paul expresses the significance of sexual sin in the first letter to the Corinthians when he writes,

> Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:18-20)

**Training in love.**  Of course, still more is required of our ministry to sexual strugglers than simply confrontation.  We are called to provide insight into the worship-change and heart-change that needs to take place in order for true Spirit-empowered sanctification to happen.  Our goal with a sexual struggler is more than simply to get them to stop performing the most apparent sexual sin.  Our goal is for them to grow in Christlikeness and for their heart to manifest worship for God in their sexuality. Therefore, in the context of the class, the importance of identifying self-worship (mediated through their particular desires) was presented as a fundamental first step to training in righteousness.

In response to this identification of self-worship, the next step in training in righteousness involves reminding the struggler of gospel-truths.  This will necessarily include reminding them of their forgiveness, new life, freedom, the indwelling of the Spirit, and many other truths and consequences of the person and work of Christ.  In the context of the class we, again, did this by identifying the gospel-truths expressed in passages like Colossians 2:8-15, Ephesians 1:3-14, and 1 Peter 1:3-5.

In addition to reminding the sexual struggler of their positional righteousness

in Christ, the struggler ought to also be instructed to live out that righteousness in response. There are many commands throughout the New Testament that one could point to, however, in order to tie these commands back directly to the gospel-truths that are meant to inspire them, we looked, again, at the instructions and commands from the same letters that were considered above, namely, Colossians 3:1-14, Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32, and 1 Peter 1:6-9, 14-16. Whether the struggle is depression or sexual issues, the truths that transform us and the commands that instruct us are still the very same.

This concluded our discussion of sexual issues, and having walked through this similar structure regarding both depression and sexual issues, we then turned our attention to the third and final issue that would be addressed in this class: eating disorders.

### The Gospel and Eating Disorders:
### Class Weeks 8-10

The third spiritual issue that we addressed in class was another general class of issues that are commonly referred to as eating disorders. This includes anorexia, bulimia, and overeating. We, again, spent the first week "listening" to the personal and cultural experience of eating disorders. The second week we, again, discussed the biblical nature of these problems, looking at how eating issues are brought on and caused by both suffering and sin, as well as demonstrating how the gospel and truth of Scripture are sufficient to address them. The third week we, again, sought to apply the truth we had learned by discussing how we might minister to someone who is struggling in regards to their eating using the framework of the previously provided methodology for personal ministry.

**Listening to Eating Disorders**

**The personal experience of eating disorders.** The first class session on

eating disorders began with an evaluation of the DSM-IV-TR[32] and proposed DSM-V[33] definitions for Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge Eating Disorder.  The conclusion was that, while these definitions may be helpful for research or insurance reimbursement purposes, they do very little to contribute to one's understanding of the actual issues at hand.  In fact, the definitions provided by these manuals do not even make their distinctions based upon behavioral problems, but instead base their diagnosis fundamentally upon body-weight problems.  Therefore, these definitions may identify the most extreme cases of eating disorders, but they do not include many of the other motivational and behavioral eating issues that exist.

To this end, three simple, biblically inspired definitions were proposed.  (1) Anorexia is an idolatrous desire for being physically thin, resulting in intentional, voluntary, self-starvation. (2) Bulimia is an idolatrous desire for both being thin and eating food, resulting in periodic binge eating and subsequent purging of some form.  (3) Overeating is an idolatrous desire for eating food, resulting in periodic binge eating or regularly excessive food consumption.  Therefore, all eating issues were generally summarized as an idolatrous desire for either eating food or for attaining a certain body type/size.

From the foundation of these definitions, the class went on to examine the personal experience of eating issues by asking, "How does it feel?"  To this answer we discussed many different experiences associated with eating issues including: control, fear, an unrealistic self-image, denial, secrecy, and hopelessness.  As Elyse Fitzpatrick so powerfully writes, "Tyrant is just the right word to use when it comes to the way many of us think about food, dieting, and our weight.  Tyranny is oppression.  It is enslavement.

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[32]American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual,* 4th ed. Text Revision.

[33]American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5 Development* [on-line]; accessed 27 August 2011; available from http://www.dsm5.org; Internet.

It means that we're dominated by thoughts and habits that torment and overpower."[34]

In addition, because of the unique ways in which eating issues impact our physical bodies, we also took a few minutes in class to discuss the physical experience of eating issues and the impact these issues can have on our organs and physical systems.[35]

**The cultural experience of eating disorders in the world.** There are many different ways in which the world we live in affirms and encourages eating issues. For one, the general obsession with physical beauty provides a cultural milieu that is simply overwhelming. This is compounded by the fact that many forms of bulimia pass as acceptable forms of weight-control.[36] As long as a "healthy" weight is maintained, many in our culture will promote all sorts of forms of purging as an appropriate way to "have your cake and eat it too," literally. The tension of this experience is only heightened by the ironic cultural promotion of overeating. As one author describes,

> The food industry spends billions of dollars each year on advertising and promotion to create an environment that constantly pressures us to consume . . . . Americans have almost immediate access to a poor diet – to high-calorie foods that are inexpensive, widely available, heavily promoted, and good tasting.[37]

While these cultural dynamics promote eating issues, the experience of these issues is oftentimes conceptualized in ways that are largely shaped by popular culture as well. The two related ways that eating disorders are most often conceptualized in our culture are as either a chemical imbalance or a mental disease. These two conceptualizations are related but still distinct. The theory of chemical imbalance, just

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[34]Fitzpatrick, *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*, 17.

[35]The information for this section was adapted from Raymond E. Vath, *Counseling Those with Eating Disorders*, vol. 4 of *Resources for Christian Counseling*, ed. Gary R. Collins (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986).

[36]Pam Verdevelt and Joyce Whiman, *Walking a Thin Line: Anorexia and Bulimia* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1985), 25.

[37]L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 64.

like in depression, claims that the brain itself is functioning abnormally in regards to its chemical makeup. It is for this reason that anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medications are sometimes prescribed for those suffering with eating issues. However, in spite of their common use in treating eating disorders, the scientific research has never demonstrated that they actually address any physiological problem, and in fact has brought any clear efficacy at all into question.[38]

Interestingly, the disease model of eating disorders has less to do with the actual scientific research and more to do with the disease metaphor so often popularly used in regard to addictions. The problematic aspect of this metaphor, as discussed in the previous section on sexual issues, is that it has largely lost its metaphorical quality. People have mostly stopped saying that eating disorders are *like* a disease and have more commonly stated that eating disorders *are* a disease. In the context of the class, we evaluated how these cultural dynamics can drastically impact the experience of those who struggle in this way.

**The cultural experience of eating disorders in the church.** The other cultural setting that can drastically impact Christians who are struggling with eating issues is the culture of the church. To conclude this class session we looked briefly at some of the cultural aspects in the church that can contribute to and shape the experience of eating issues. The main cultural component in the church that we discussed was the incredible lack of attention that our eating habits receive. On one end of the continuum, gluttony appears to be completely ignored in many circles as a form of sin. The church seems to barely touch the surface of the problem when someone in the church becomes obese. Similarly, anorexia and bulimia are often ignored and not addressed consistently

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[38]Andrew Court et al., "What is the Scientific Evidence for the Use of Antipsychotic Medication in Anorexia Nervosa?" *Eating Disorders* 16 (2008): 217-23; Wayne A. Bowers and Arnold E. Andersen, "Cognitive-Behavior Therapy With Eating Disorders: The Role of Medication in Treatment" *J Cog Psychother* 21, no. 1 (2007): 16-27.

until someone in the church has reached a radically unhealthy low body weight. But, for all of those with culturally acceptable body types who are practicing sinful and unhealthy eating behaviors, the topic seems to rarely, if ever, get addressed. This will inevitably have an impact on how those who are struggling will conceptualize the reality or significance of their problem.

**The Biblical Nature of Eating Disorders**

Our second class session on the topic of eating disorders, again, sought to identify the biblical nature of eating disorders. This class began with a positive identification of the biblical goal of eating: worshipful health. Eating has been given to us to be the means of physical sustenance for our bodies and for the purpose of worshipping God through that enjoyable consumption. Therefore, "thinness" is not a biblical goal, and similarly "selfish feasting" is not a biblical goal. Our goal in consuming food ought to be to provide our body with the intake it needs to sustain and thrive, and to be motivated by and inspired to worship God, as we joyfully taste that which he has provided for us to eat.

As we had done in the previous classes, we reviewed the relationship between worship in our hearts, our desires, and our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. We discussed how our desires shape our food consumption, and we then looked at some of the specific ways in which our eating issues are caused by both suffering and sin.

**Eating disorders are caused by suffering.** There are a number of external factors that contribute to eating problems among Christians. Simply the fact that we have fallen bodies and live in a fallen environment provides temptation to problematic eating practices. Genesis 3 tells us that in our fallen world food will be difficult to come by, and ever since that horrific day, humanity has been developing mechanisms by which food may be easier to obtain. Unfortunately, however, these mechanisms are not without consequences. The ease of food today comes with a price in the form of the high calorie,

processed, corn-based foods we consume.  This price is compounded by the fact that our fallen bodies are not getting healthier and more fit as we get older, but are deteriorating with age, drastically impacting both our health and "body-image."

As we looked at in the previous section, our fallen culture is a form of suffering as well.  The combination of our "beauty" culture with our "foodie" culture produces constant discontentment regardless of how one is eating.  This is an opportunity that is all too attractive to Satan who confirms our suspicions and increases the volume of the body-image related accusations of our flesh.  After discussing all of these aspects of suffering leading to eating problems, the final example of suffering we looked at was the suffering that we experience from others' sin.  Whether it is repetitive comments regarding our physical appearance or the constant provision of unhealthy food, others' sin can drastically impact our eating.  In addition, when others sin against us in ways that cause deep emotional or physical pain, it can tempt us to turn to food either as a means of comfort or control, which leads us to our next topic.

**Eating disorders are caused by sin.**  While oftentimes brought on by external suffering, our problems with eating are ultimately the result of sinful, self-worshipping desires in our heart.  To this end, we discussed a number of the sinful desires that manifest in different forms of eating issues.

Two of the most prominent sinful desires that can lead a person to consume an excess of food are a craving for instant gratification and a desire for comfort.  Eating food is most often a thoroughly enjoyable experience, which is why it is such a common avenue for sin when we desire instant gratification.  Food provides a "joy" fix that may not last, but is instantaneous in its delivery.  People will oftentimes also turn to food instead of God as a source of comfort when life gets tough.  Viewing food as this kind of God-replacement is at the heart of much overeating.

Three of the most prominent sinful desires that can lead a person to some form

of self-starvation are the pride of perfection, a desire for control, and ungodly fears. Interestingly, while the pride of perfection may most often come in the form of a pursuit of physical beauty, it can also come in other forms as well. For example, athletes may struggle with their eating as they pursue perfection in their sport. Control is another significant issue that drives those who are starving themselves. It is common for someone struggling with their eating to feel like their weight is one of the only things they can control, or that they *must* control their weight or they will lose control altogether.[39] Finally, a blanket term to describe much of what is happening in those who are struggling with eating issues is ungodly fear. There may be a fear of getting "fat," a fear of being unattractive, a fear of what others will think, or a fear of losing control. All of which exposes the self-worshipping nature of their desires.

**The gospel and suffering.** For the third time, we looked at how the truth of the gospel ministers to those who are suffering. In class, this provided a powerful way to think about all of the component parts to eating issues. When we consider the overwhelming impact of the culture around us, the powerful influence of Satan and others' sin, and the inevitable reality of our fallen bodies and environment it can be easy to become discouraged. However, the Bible refers to all of these negative influences as "suffering" or "trials." As such, the Bible tells us plainly and succinctly how the work of Christ in the gospel ministers to sufferers and redeems their trials.

It is for this reason that we, again, looked at the content in James 1:2-4, 12-14; 1 Peter 1:3-7; and Romans 5:2-4. These passages tell us that no matter how overwhelming or significant the suffering we have experienced seems, God intends to use it and redeem it, and he calls us to rejoice in light of that fact. This is just as true for those struggling with eating issues as those struggling with any other issue. There is

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[39]Jenni Schaefer, *Life without Ed* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 81.

reason to rejoice because God has overcome the powerful enculturation we have been mired in, as well as all of the other forms of suffering we have been bombarded with, and will use it all to produce endurance, steadfastness, character, and ultimately hope in the brother or sister struggling in this way.

**The gospel and sin.** Of course, the ministry of the gospel also extends to address the sinful desires at the heart of our eating problems. God has not left us alone in our fear, longing for comfort, desire for control, or pursuit of perfection. In fact, he has met all of these desires and more in Christ. *He* is our perfection. *He* is in control. *He* is our comfort. *He* has cast out all our fear.

So, it was for this reason that we looked for a third time at the content of Colossians 2:13-15 and meditated upon our identity in Christ, what he has given us, what he has done for us, and who we are in Him. And for a third time we meditated upon Colossians 3:1-14 and applied the instructions provided there specifically to the topic of eating issues.

In light of the truth of the gospel, we are called to, first, "set our mind on the things that are above." A fairly clear summary of the fundamental problem at work in those who struggle with eating issues is that their minds are set on the things that are below. But God calls us to look up towards that which is eternal, remembering what he has done, and gaining an eternal perspective in the process. We are, secondly, to "put to death what is earthly," mortifying the sinful focus on the body and food, and putting to death our sinful and unhealthy practices that flow out of that focus. And finally, we are to put on Christ-like love. We ended this class by brainstorming together what Christ-like eating would look like. We discussed how we could eat worshipfully and how we could eat out of love for others as well.[40] These are the motivations that ought to be at

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[40]Examples included actions such as not eating until over-full and proactively sharing food with others.

the heart of our eating habits, and so we were able to see, again, that the instructions here in Colossians 3 are not specific to a particular issue, but have application in every area of life, and in the face of every sin with which we battle. And, so, it is from this perspective that we transitioned to the final class session on eating issues, asking the question, "How can we apply this truth lovingly to those who are struggling with their eating?"

**"Truthing" Eating Strugglers in Love**

Just as we had done with depression and sexual issues, we discussed what it would look like to apply the truth of the past two weeks in a loving way to those who are struggling with eating issues.[41] This class session began with the class brainstorming different actions that they could imagine would be most needed as they began ministering to someone with an eating disorder. In light of our previous discussions of what "truthing" in love involves, most of the aspects of ministry below were mentioned.

**Serving in love.** As we began looking at the ways in which we can serve those who are struggling with eating disorders, we took time out to discuss an aspect of service that is particularly unique to eating disorders and that is the involvement of medical practitioners in the recovery process. Because the physical consequences of an eating disorder can be so severe and dangerous, the involvement of a physician who can diagnose and oversee any particular physical problems and a nutritionist who can help the struggler to identify what healthy eating entails are essential. As a mutual minister in the body of Christ, we have the capacity to sufficiently minister to the heart issues at work in those with eating disorders, but we do not have the expertise to address the physical issues that may develop as a result of that heart issue. As one biblical counselor writes,

> [The] ideal situation includes the active participation of an interdisciplinary process that facilitates the coordination of pastoral, medical, nursing, social service, and occupational therapy goals and interventions. This implies that the competent and

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[41]The class notes from this class session are provided in Appendix 4.

knowledgeable biblical counselor must be included as an integral member of the team. It is deemed unwise, unprofessional, unbiblical and even foolish to approach the problem without knowledgeable medical intervention.[42]

After discussing the importance of involving medical professionals when necessary, we went on to discuss the other ways in which a person struggling with eating may be served in love. As with the previous issues, this involved discussions on praying, pursuing, sharing, bearing, and forgiving. The aspect that we spent the most time on was the importance of pursuing the person who is struggling with an eating disorder. Because of the secret and shameful nature of eating problems, an additional level of pursuit is often required for those who are in the midst of the struggle. And, it is imperative that this pursuit does not fade away at the first sign of improved eating habits. Continual, consistent, compassionate love is required when ministering to those struggling with eating disorders.

**Speaking in love.** Of course, words must accompany our actions of love in ministering to others. One of the most common experiences for those struggling with eating disorders is a sense of hopelessness. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that we give hope to those who are struggling in this way. Even when those we are ministering to do not seem to have hope, we are called to believe in the hope of the gospel for them, affirming the truth to them, and encouraging them that, in Christ, there is hope for transformation, and hope beyond their suffering.

In addition, we again examined how our ministry ought to necessarily include the affirmation of godly thoughts and action and the confrontation of ungodly thoughts and actions. Because of the private, and sometimes embarrassing, nature of eating disorders, loving confrontation is, unfortunately, sometimes replaced with passive-aggressive comments or jokes. But, love necessitates clear, direct, gentle confrontation

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[42]Henry Eagleton, "Counseling and Conceptualizing the Bulimic From a Biblical Perspective" (D.Min. project, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1986), 4-5.

whenever required, and clear, direct, gentle affirmation whenever possible.

In addition, because of the sensitive nature of eating disorders and the unfamiliarity of so many people with them, we wrapped up this section by discussing some of the types of comments to avoid when ministering to someone struggling with an eating disorder. Generally, these comments focus on the external issue instead of compassionately getting at the heart of the struggle and might include comments such as "You don't look like you have an eating disorder," or "If you think you're fat…you must be crazy." These responses are regrettably commonplace, even though it would seem to be common sense to avoid them.

**Training in love.** Of course, if our goal is in line with God's goal for the person struggling with an eating disorder, then healthy eating or an appropriate weight would not be our ultimate goal, but instead we would be most fundamentally concerned with heart transformation leading to worshipful, sanctified eating. And, if this is our goal, our ministry must involve more than simply listening, service, affirmation, and confrontation. It must involve training in righteousness aimed at the heart.

As had been looked at before, we discussed the primary importance of identifying self-worship in the heart of the struggler. All eating issues flow from a heart that, in one way or another, has chosen to worship itself instead of God. The differences in how each particular eating problem manifests itself may be determined by the different specific desires that each person possesses, but ultimately all eating problems are, at their core, a worship problem. Of course, because of the gospel, uncovering self-worship ought to be immediately followed up by a reminder of gospel-truths. The indicatives that declare who God is, who Christ is, what he has done, and who he has declared us to be in him remind us of the glorious forgiveness we have for the self-worship that so ravages our hearts and lives. In addition, it is these truths (which we summarized in class, again, by looking at passages like Colossians 2:8-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; and 1 Peter 1:3-5) that

motivate our obedience and the transformation necessary in the face of eating disorders.

We, again, looked at the call to repentance that comes in response to the gospel indicatives throughout the New Testament. With eating disorders specifically in mind, we looked at the gospel commands in Colossians 3:1-14; Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32; and 1 Peter 1:6-9, 14-16, comparing the love-motivated repentance of eating disorders to the love-motivated repentance of depression and sexual issues. In addition, we also brainstormed together some specific gospel-imperatives that would be particularly poignant to those struggling with eating issues such as self-control (Prov 25:28; 1 Tim 2:9), contentment (1 Tim 6:6-8; Phil 4:11), and self-discipline (Gal 5:16-24). Finally, in helping the struggler to obey these gospel-commands, we discussed the importance (especially for the struggler with an eating disorder) of a practical plan of obedience. For someone who has been living, thinking, and eating a certain way for months and years, change is no small endeavor. For this reason, we can lovingly serve the struggler by helping her make a practical and realistic plan moving forward as she seeks to walk in the freedom and obedience that Christ has called her to.

## Summarizing and Practicing Case Studies:
### Class Weeks 11-12

**Looking at Case Studies**

During the final two weeks of class we spent our time discussing case studies of the issues covered in class. The goal in these discussions was to help students grow in wisdom as they seek to apply the truth they were equipped with in class to the complexity of real life situations. Issues like depression, sexual problems, or eating disorders can begin to sound simple and easy to understand when discussed purely theoretically, and so the time spent going through case studies was designed to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical as we examined the complexity of real life situations.

The first week of case studies was spent on three different cases of depression.

In order to provide an appreciation for the diversity of depression, three fairly different situations were chosen. The first case we discussed was the case of an elderly woman in the church who has become increasingly withdrawn and, while still physically able, has lost her desire to get out of the house at all. The second case we discussed was the case of a 24 year-old recent college graduate and new Christian who had struggled with depression before he became a Christian and is now greatly confused as to why it has "come back." Finally, we looked at the case of a 42 year-old woman who became depressed shortly following the birth of her third child (a pregnancy that came as a surprise after her two daughters had reached high school age). Each of these cases had their own unique complexities and dynamics, but they provided an excellent context to discuss how the students would seek to minister to each different struggler.

During the second week of case studies, we examined two cases involving sexual issues and one case involving an eating disorder. The first case we looked at was a fairly typical case of a man in his mid-thirties who has struggled with masturbation and pornography for twenty years. The complexity in this case was that the man feels defeated and hopeless after he has unsuccessfully tried accountability groups and many other "tricks." The second case we looked at was much less typical and involved a man who has recently become a Christian and has struggled for years with a shoe fetish. While less common, this case provided an excellent opportunity for the class to discuss how they would minister to someone with a struggle that was outside of their own personal experience or exposure. Finally, we ended the class by discussing the case of a young woman who struggled severely with anorexia. This case necessarily involved medical professionals because of the seriousness of the struggle, and it was quite helpful for students to consider how equipped lay counselors in the church could minister effectively to someone in such a dire physical and emotional situation.

**The Repetitive Nature of the Class**

In addition to our discussion of these specific cases, we also reviewed the implications of the repetitive nature of the class. As we walked through each issue, there arose a repetitive structure that was accompanied by some repetitive content. Each issue was defined in terms of suffering and sin. Each issue was to be practically tackled using the same summary terms (knowing, serving, speaking, training). Each issue was even ultimately addressed using the same passages of Scripture (Jas 1:1-2; Rom 5:2-4; Col 2:13-15; 3:1-14; Eph 1:3-14; 4:1-3, 25-32, etc.).

The purpose for this repetition was two-fold. First, the repetition helped students to see that the issues discussed are not fundamentally different issues that necessarily require fundamentally different expertise. They are all worship issues expressed in the context of a fallen world, and the only expertise required is a firm understanding of how the gospel addresses suffering and sin in the life of the believer, and a compassionate heart that is ready to know, serve, speak, and train in love.

The repetition was also designed to be the means by which this particular equipping could bear fruit exponentially in the ministry of those who received it. By demonstrating the common way in which Christ in the gospel ministers to these diverse issues, this repetition was designed to illustrate for students how Christ in the gospel ministers to those who are struggling with other spiritual / emotional / psychological issues that were not specifically covered in this class. In this way, the repetition of this class was designed as the means by which this class could similarly equip students to minister to those struggling with anxiety, grief, loneliness, and so many other issues.

**Interviews and Questionnaires:**
**One Week After Class**

The final week of the project took place after the final class session was completed. This week consisted of two activities: interviews with each of the class

participants and the completion of the post-class questionnaire.  During the week

following the completion of the class (with some small overlap with the preceding week),

I met with each participant in the class to discuss what they had learned and how they

would be applying what they learned in their own ministry to others.  While the delivery

of information is incredibly important, this kind of one-on-one discipleship and

discussion is essential if we are to expect the knowledge gained to actually take root in

someone's life.  Just as was discussed in the class, in order to be an effective pastor and

teacher I must listen to, serve, and respond to (not just speak to) those I am hoping to

teach and disciple.  Also during this final week, I met one final time with the focus group

that was selected in order to evaluate my teaching and help me identify ways to enhance

student learning, involvement, and engagement.

In addition, I also asked each participant to complete a post-class questionnaire

that mirrored the pre-class questionnaire.  The comparison of these two questionnaires

will provide the ability to evaluate the efficacy of the class in increasing the five

information-based goals identified at the beginning of the project.  Namely that this class

would increase: (1) the participant's knowledge regarding the experience of the three

spiritual issues addressed in class, (2) the participant's knowledge of the biblical nature of

these spiritual issues, (3) the participant's knowledge of appropriate Scriptures that may

be helpful to one struggling with these spiritual issues, (4) the participant's wisdom in

ministering to one who is struggling with these spiritual issues, and  (5) the participant's

confidence in their own Spirit-empowered ability to walk with someone who is struggling

with these spiritual issues.  These questionnaires were due on the final day of the project

(December 11, 2011), and with their reception, the project was completed.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY
RESEARCH PROJECT

**Introduction**

Spiritual issues are a constant in our fallen world, and the complexity of those problems can oftentimes seem overwhelming.  Whether the issue is depression, sexual problems, an eating disorder, or one of the multitude of problems that were not addressed in this project, helping others to grow in Christ in the midst of these issues can seem a daunting task.  Incredibly, however, God has sufficiently equipped us in his Word and his Spirit to address these problems with wisdom, conviction, and confidence.  This sufficiency was at the heart of this research project and forms the foundation for all biblical personal ministry.

In light of that sufficiency, this research project sought to demonstrate the empowerment God has provided for all Christians to minister effectively and powerfully to those who are struggling in various ways.  It was upon the theological foundation of passages such as 2 Peter 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:11-16; Galatians 5:22-25; 1 Peter 1:3-7; and Colossians 3:1-14 (as detailed in chapter 2) that this project was built.  And it was from the professional insight of many different experts (as detailed in chapter 3) that much practical insight for this project was gleaned.  The project itself was initiated and completed in fifteen weeks in the fall of 2011 (as detailed in chapter 4), and this final chapter will evaluate the efficacy of the project as a whole and evaluate it according to the purpose, goals, and methodology previously set forth (as detailed in chapter 1).

**Evaluation of the Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip those doing personal ministry at Cornerstone Church in West Los Angeles, California, to disciple and counsel others who are struggling with the spiritual and emotional issues common to their context. I believe that this purpose was fully achieved.

The prevalence of depression, sexual issues, and eating disorders in our context was confirmed as we began to discuss the issues and realized that almost everyone in the class had some sort of experience with them. This was also confirmed by the fact that every single participant in the class noted that they had either personally struggled with, or had ministered to someone who had struggled with at least two out of the three issues addressed in the class.

The fact that the purpose of equipping the selected servant ministers to address these specific issues had been achieved was confirmed in two key ways. First, subjectively, every participant in the class expressed a deep sense of confidence during our post-class interviews and conversations together. They each conveyed that they felt much more equipped and able to minister to those who are struggling with serious spiritual issues after having taken the class. Secondly, and more objectively, there was a significant rise in both the self-reported and instructor-evaluated scores from the pre-class questionnaire to the post-class questionnaire. The details of these scores will be discussed in the following section evaluating the specific goals of the project, but since it can be objectively demonstrated that the goals of the project were attained, that should confirm the assertion that the overall purpose of the project was accomplished.

**Evaluation of the Goals**

This research project began with six primary goals. These goals provide the means by which the effectiveness of this project may be measured. Each of the goals was evaluated through the comparison of scores achieved on a pre-class questionnaire and a

post-class questionnaire (Appendix 1).

The first goal was to increase servant ministers' understanding of the spiritual issues that are most common to their context. Understanding the experience of those who are struggling was focused upon in order to increase the servant ministers' empathy for those they are ministering to. In order to accomplish this goal, one week of each issue was dedicated simply to "listening" to the experience of that issue. This was accomplished by discussing both the personal experience and the cultural experience of these issues in some depth. The efficacy of this effort was then evaluated by measuring the difference in servant ministers' understanding of relevant topics before and after taking the course using three self-evaluated questions (participants gave themselves a score) and three instructor-evaluated questions regarding the participant's understanding of the personal experience of the issues studied.[1] The average of the students' self-evaluated knowledge of these three issues increased from 6.0 to 8.0,[2] an increase of 33 percent. The average of the students' instructor-evaluated knowledge of these three issues also increased from 6.5 to 8.9, suggesting a comparable increase of 37 percent. This increase was also confirmed in the post-class interviews as all of the students demonstrated a greater appreciation for the unique suffering experienced by those struggling with these issues. These evaluation techniques, therefore, confirmed significant growth in the students' understanding of the experience of these spiritual issues and so it can be concluded that this goal was achieved.

The second goal was to increase servant ministers' knowledge of the biblical nature of these spiritual issues. In addition to understanding the experience of these issues, servant ministers must also understand the biblical nature of them in order to

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[1]For the sake of consistency, the same questions were asked on both the pre-class questionnaire and post-class questionnaire.

[2]All scoring took place on a 10-point scale.

minister to those who are struggling.  In order to accomplish this goal, the second week of our study of each issue was dedicated to a discussion on the role that both suffering and sin play in the causation of these problems as well as how the truth of the gospel is sufficient to minister to them.  This effort was, similarly, evaluated by measuring the difference in servant ministers' understanding of the biblical nature of the issues studied both before and after taking the course using three self-evaluated questions and three instructor-evaluated questions.  The average of the students' self-evaluated knowledge of the biblical nature of these three issues increased approximately 32 percent from 6.3 to 8.3 points.  The average of the students' instructor-evaluated knowledge of the biblical nature of these three issues increased from 5.9 to 8.5 points, suggesting an even more notable increase in understanding of 44 percent.  Again, these tests demonstrated significant growth in the students' understanding of the biblical nature of these spiritual issues and so it can be concluded that this second goal was also achieved.

The third goal was to increase servant ministers' knowledge of relevant Scriptures that may be helpful both to encourage and exhort someone who is struggling with these particular spiritual issues.  It is not enough that students understand the biblical nature of these issues theoretically, they must also be equipped to be able to minister the truth of Scripture (and not simply the truth of this class) to those who are hurting.  For it is ultimately only the knowledge of Christ through his Word that is sufficient to address these problems in living.  This goal was also evaluated through three self-evaluated questions and three instructor-evaluated questions measuring the difference in servant ministers' ability to identify specific scriptural passages pertinent to the issues studied both before and after taking the course.  The average of the students' self-evaluated ability to identify appropriate passages increased from 5.9 to 8.1 points, a 37 percent increase.  The average of the students' instructor-evaluated ability to identify appropriate passages increased nearly 50 percent from 6.2 to 9.2 points.  Therefore, this increase demonstrated significant growth in the students' ability to identify scripture passages

applicable to these specific spiritual issues and so it can be concluded that this third goal was also achieved.

The fourth goal was to increase servant ministers' wisdom in ministering the Word of God to those who are struggling with these particular issues. The ability to accurately measure wisdom is questionable to say the least, and the fact that wisdom is a God-given attribute (Jas 1:5) may even bring into question the appropriateness of it as a research project goal. However, wisdom ought to be the natural byproduct of an increase in equipping and knowledge in the heart of the Spirit-empowered believer. As such, it can be assumed that if the knowledge identified in the previous three goals is appropriately internalized and illuminated by the work of the Spirit of God, we ought to expect wisdom as a result. It was determined that one way in which this wisdom might be assessed is by asking students to share the process their ministry would take given a hypothetical case study. As a result, this goal was evaluated by measuring the difference in servant ministers' response to a case study provided in both the pre-class and post-class questionnaires. In order to minimize the innumerable amount of variables, the exact same case study was provided in both questionnaires. The average of the students' scores on the case study increased approximately 25 percent from 6.9 to 8.7. In addition, this growth was confirmed, albeit even more subjectively, through the two weeks of case studies discussed in class. As one who has known all of the class participants for multiple years, it was greatly encouraging to see the growth in wisdom and maturity demonstrated through their deliberations on how to handle specific, complex situations. It is upon the basis of these measurements, and their marked growth, that I believe significant growth in the students' wisdom was demonstrated and so it can be concluded that this fourth goal was also achieved.

The fifth goal was to increase the servant ministers' confidence in walking with people through difficult spiritual issues. One of the greatest weaknesses of many of our servant ministers coming into the class was their lack of confidence when it came to

ministering the Word of God to those who were struggling with "serious issues." It is this lack of confidence that has oftentimes prevented many of our equipped servant ministers from pursuing those they knew were hurting or struggling. Because another person cannot assess one's confidence, this goal was evaluated by measuring the difference in servant ministers' responses to three self-evaluated questions before and after taking the course. These questions simply asked the students how confident they were in their ability to minister to someone struggling with each of the issues studied. The average of the students' self-reported confidence increased a full 40 percent from 6.0 to 8.4 points on a ten-point scale. In addition, this increase in confidence was also demonstrated by the fact that while only 7 out of the 14 students noted that the case study provided in the questionnaire was something they felt comfortable handling before the class, after the completion of the class all 14 students noted that the case study was a situation they felt confident to minister in. Since lack of confidence is something that can so often hinder equipped people from ministering, a 40 percent increase in confidence as well as the fact that all the participants felt comfortable to handle the provided case study after taking the class ought to clearly confirm that this fifth goal was achieved.

The final goal was a personal goal. As a result of this project, I hoped to also enhance my own teaching skill and ability. My goal was that my teaching style would continue to develop in a way that enhances student learning, involvement, and engagement. While this is probably the most difficult goal to evaluate, I did so by getting feedback from the focus group of students. The feedback I received from the focus group was overwhelmingly positive. The pedagogical aspects that they appreciated the most, and that developed the most over the course of the class included: the balance between lecture and discussion, interactive and leading questions, the complementary nature of out-of-class reading assignments, and the interactive and complex nature of the time spent on case studies. Areas for continued development included: the need to integrate case studies or situations into the content of lecture classes and continued limiting of the

amount of content per class so that all scheduled content can be addressed appropriately. These encouragements and helpful critiques provided the context for the continued development of my teaching, and it is for this reason that I believe this sixth, and final, goal was achieved as well.

## Evaluation of the Research Methodology

The means by which the goals stated above were achieved and measured was through the research methodology explained in detail in chapter four. The efficacy of the research methodology will now be evaluated in its component parts.

The selection process was a definite success. Students who were invited to participate in the class had to have completed all four of Cornerstone's foundational equipping classes. This requirement proved to be vital as it allowed the class discussion to revolve around the issues at hand and helped the class to avoid prolegomena matters such as the nature of counseling or the relationship between psychology and Scripture. In addition, because of the exclusive nature of the course, students seemed to be more invested in the class itself knowing that they were specifically chosen to participate.

Participants' knowledge of the spiritual issues covered was assessed both before and after the class through the pre/post-class questionnaire. As was demonstrated in the previous section, the questionnaire effectively measured the five goals for which it was created. In fact, the questionnaire was so helpful in evaluating the goals of the class that I would like to incorporate some sort of similar evaluation into the rest of the equipping we do at Cornerstone Church. Both the diversity and thoroughness of the questionnaire proved to be extremely helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the class.

The 12-week class began with one week of reviewing material covered in the previous equipping classes for the sake of rooting the class discussion in the biblical model of change and methodology of personal ministry. While I had questioned the need for a week of this kind of review, the foundational discussion proved to be instrumental

as it provided the opportunity to summarize and clarify much of what had been previously learned through the foundational equipping classes. It also provided an opportunity to remind students of the aspects of personal ministry that they may have forgotten. Overall, taking the first week to work on review proved to be quite beneficial.

The following nine weeks were spent addressing the three identified spiritual issues, three weeks at a time. Again, the three spiritual issues that were addressed were: depression, sexual issues, and eating disorders. During the three weeks on each issue we spent time discussing five different aspects of each issue.

We discussed the personal experience of each problem. These discussions majored on descriptions of each particular struggle in order for the student to gain compassion and understanding for those who are struggling. This proved to be incredibly helpful, and was mentioned by many of the more seasoned counselors in the class as the most helpful aspect of the class because of the emphasis placed on truly understanding someone and their struggle before trying to minister the Word of God to them. The success of both this discussion and the discussion on the cultural experience of each problem were clearly demonstrated in the achievement of the first goal mentioned above.

Our discussions on the cultural experience of each problem proved to be quite helpful because they helped students to gain an appreciation for the kind of broad-based, environmental suffering that so powerfully contributes to the issues examined. Given the opportunity to do this class again, I would most definitely spend at least the same amount of time focused on the experience of these issues, for it is the understanding of a person's experience that allows us to wisely and lovingly minister to those who are struggling.

In addition, we then discussed the biblical nature of each problem. It was the weeks spent on this topic that proved to be the most foundational for the majority of the class. First, identifying how both suffering and sin contribute to each one of the issues discussed provided a helpful construct by which students could understand each issue using biblical terminology and concepts. Furthermore, repeatedly demonstrating how the

gospel ministers to us as we both suffer and sin allowed students to tangibly see the sufficiency of Christ and the sufficiency of Scripture at work with real, complex issues. This proved to be priceless for many students as their belief that Scripture is sufficient to handle any personal problem morphed into a deeply held conviction, as is demonstrated by the achievement of the second and fifth goals reviewed in the previous section.

During the same class periods in which we covered the biblical nature of each problem, we also discussed some of the passages of Scripture that speak specifically to these problems. As was demonstrated through the achievement of the third goal above, the focus on these passages achieved its desired result. In fact, anecdotally, it was my impression that this was the biggest area of growth for the majority of the students. Many of the students who came into the class a little unsure about where they would turn in Scripture when ministering to someone struggling with a particular issue left the class with a much greater sense of where to turn in their Bible, or what passages might be helpful.

Finally, we also discussed what it looks like to lovingly and wisely walk with someone through these problems. These classes were structured in a helpful and memorable way in order for students to be able to evaluate their own love for and ministry to others consistently and repeatedly. However, I believe that it would have been even more helpful if, in addition to this structure, more case studies or case situations had been folded into this content as the goal of this content was to be as practical as possible. However, as was demonstrated in the 25 percent pre-class to post-class increase in students' scores on the case study portion of the questionnaire, the discussions on the practical implications of wise love in action still proved to be beneficial.

The final two weeks of class time were spent going over case studies in order to root the previous discussion in the complexities of real lives. These discussions proved to be incredibly helpful for students as they transitioned much of the content in

class from the theoretical to the practical and provided numerous examples of what wisdom applied to particular situations may look like. In fact, these discussions proved to be so helpful, that I believe they should constitute a larger portion of the training for future iterations of this class.

During the 12-week class, I also met with each participant individually (or together with their leadership partner) in order to answer any specific questions and help the participant apply what was being learned to their specific ministry situations. I also met with each participant individually (or together with their leadership partner) the week after the class ended in order to answer any remaining questions, get feedback on the class, and personally evaluate how they grew over the course of the class. While many of these meetings would have happened anyways, in the context of regular ministry and discipleship relationships, the discipline of individually discussing the content of the class and the implication of that content on the individual's unique ministry opportunities proved to be incredibly helpful. It was in this context that some of the unique obstacles to personal ministry in the lives of the participants were able to be addressed, and the opportunities for ministry were able to be identified and maximized.

Lastly, at three times during the 12-week class, I also met with a small focus group consisting of three class participants (one other elder, one community group leader, and one other servant minister). This focus group was asked to evaluate my teaching in order to help me identify ways I can improve my teaching so as to enhance student learning, involvement, and engagement. This is another class component that I have not formally utilized previously, but that I found particularly helpful. First, the feedback from this focus group provided me with added confidence regarding the structure and general pedagogy I had employed in the class. Much of the feedback in these areas was overwhelmingly positive. Second, the feedback also helped me to think outside of the box regarding the incorporation of different types of teaching (lecture, guided discussion, case studies, small group discussion, etc.) with one another. This kind of focus group is

another component that I hope to incorporate into other teaching situations, as it proved enormously helpful for me as a teacher.

## Strengths

Probably the most significant strength of this project was the people who participated in it. The 14 people who took part in the class were dedicated, thoughtful, compassionate, and teachable. I cannot imagine a more mature or invested group of students, and it is this maturity that made this research project the success that it was. While this strength could be attributed to the student selection process or to the previous equipping and discipleship that each of the participants had received, the truth is that this strength is due solely to the gracious work of the Spirit of God in each of these lives individually and in the context of our church corporately.

A second strength of this project was the research that provided the groundwork for both the content of the project as well as the biblical worldview that shaped the project. This research first included the foundational exegesis provided in chapter two as well as additional exegesis that provided the content for some of the class sessions. This research also included examination of the contributions of diverse professionals to our understanding of these issues, which provided a much fuller appreciation for the experience of strugglers as well the ability to critique differing perspectives knowledgably and accurately. Finally, this research included investigation into the specific issues covered as well. This research, mainly reflected in the content of the class notes, was instrumental in providing the ability to speak with insight and wisdom to a diversity of struggles. All in all, the cumulative effect of this research was a class that contained both expertise and practical insight, a great benefit for both the students and myself.

A third strength was the diversity of the three issues covered. On the surface, depression, sexual issues, and eating disorders seem to have very little in common. In

fact, a servant minister who has experience or confidence in ministering to one of these issues will oftentimes feel completely ill-equipped to minister to one of the other issues because of the significant differences between them. This diversity provided a great opportunity to demonstrate the fundamental similarities between issues that seem so different. By using a similar structure to discuss each of these diverse issues, students were able to see the common threads of suffering, sin, and the gospel in stark contrast to the aspects of these issues that differentiate them. It was particularly this diversity that made the insight regarding their fundamental similarities so powerful.

A final strength of this project was the repetitive nature of the class. By "listening" to each issue, describing each issue in terms of suffering, describing each issue in terms of sin, demonstrating how each issue is addressed through the gospel, and discussing how each issue is ministered to in the same fundamental way, the content of these main points was truly internalized by the participants in the class. Repetition always helps students to retain information, and the same was true with the repetitive nature of this class. That which had been forgotten or not noticed after the first cycle through this information was inevitably caught after the second or third cycle. In addition, the repetition had an even greater designed effect. By repeating the fundamental biblical nature of peoples' problems in living and demonstrating the similar ways in which the gospel ministers to these problems, the class not only equipped students to address problems such as depression, sexual issues, or eating disorders, but many of the other spiritual issues that were not specifically discussed in class. By providing this repetitive framework, students were given a theoretical grid through which they may understand and minister to all sorts of diverse problems in living.

## Weaknesses

This research project also had some particular weaknesses as well. One of the weaknesses of this particular class was in the length of the class and the amount of time

dedicated to each issue.  In short, the class itself was probably too long to be replicated in an ongoing way at Cornerstone Church.  In addition, ironically, the three weeks allotted to each specific problem was probably not enough time to cover fully everything that I desired to cover.   While I was able to receive 12-week commitments from all of the participants because of the unique nature of this project, we have found that 6-week classes are far more manageable for people in our ministry context, and that a 6-week framework considerably diminishes the significant attrition that tends to take place over the course of a 12-week class.  For these reasons, when I teach this content in the future I plan to offer the same content in three six-week classes.  This would provide the opportunity for both a shorter commitment time as well as more weeks dedicated to each topic, not to mention the opportunity to possibly insert additional topics.  The only drawback to this plan would be that students would have to be encouraged to take more than one of the topical classes, otherwise the benefit of repetition would be lost.

A second weakness that should be mentioned was the division of case studies and case scenarios from the bulk of the course content.  While the two weeks spent on case studies at the end of the class were some of the most practically helpful for students, the focus group helped me to recognize how even more beneficial case studies and case situations would have been had they been sprinkled throughout the entire class.  After talking through the case studies I realized the significant illustrative impact this exercise could have when discussing more theoretical topics such as suffering and sin.  While I, personally, learn most effectively through structured presentations, I recognize how the most powerful teaching tool for many people can be to see the biblical principles and truths in action as they apply to a specific person or situation.  In teaching this content in the future, I will definitely make this adjustment, even though it would require more time to cover the content.

A final weakness that was recognized most profoundly in the post-class interviews is a more ministry-context specific weakness, and that is the current lack of

more formal opportunities at Cornerstone to do this kind of counseling and inter-personal ministry. One of the questions I asked each of the participants after the conclusion of the class was, "Do you feel you have the opportunity to minister interpersonally in the way we have discussed in class?" The answers to this question led me to recognize that while we have significantly equipped many of our servant ministers to counsel others, we have not provided them with as many opportunities as we could to utilize that equipping, especially considering the significant amount of need in the church. To this point, the main opportunity that our servant ministers have to counsel others is in the context of their community group. However, there is a great need among those in the church who are not yet a part of a community group to receive biblical care and counseling. While the easiest thing to do is to instruct them to join a community group, the current cultural expectation of formal counseling provides an incredible "front door" to interpersonal ministry and Christian community. The current weakness in our context is that we have not yet utilized our equipped servant ministers to open up that "front door." To this end, it is my intention that the next counseling related project we undertake as a church, after the completion of this research project, is to begin a formal counseling ministry by which servant ministers may have greater opportunity to use their gifting and equipping, and those who are hurting and struggling in the church may find an open door to biblical counsel and Christian community in addition to the door of community group gatherings.

**Theological Reflection**

As I reflect upon the theological impact this project has had on me, the summary that seems most accurate is that this project has confirmed many of the theological tenants I previously believed, but am now so much more convinced of.

First and foremost, when I think of the impact of this project what comes to mind is the sufficiency of Scripture. I have been convinced of the sufficiency of Scripture for a long time, however the exegesis presented in chapter two of this project

truly confirmed for me, where any residual doubt may have existed, how powerfully 2 Peter 1:3-4 confirms the sufficiency of the knowledge of Christ in the Word of God as the means by which God has provided for us everything we need to live life and minister to those around us. Similarly, being able to see the Word of God explain and minister to such diverse issues as those that were covered in chapter four only further confirmed this theological truth in my heart and mind.

Secondly, this project has strongly confirmed to me the importance of recognizing and addressing sin. God does not take sin lightly and he is most ultimately concerned with the heart of sin that has replaced him as God. Whether it is through the instructions of passages like Ephesians 4:17-32 or Colossians 3:1-14, or the warnings from passages like 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 or 1 John 1:5-10, God makes it explicitly clear that he does not tolerate our unrepentant, unconfessed sin. As we counsel one another, we cannot take sin too lightly or fail to recognize the part our sin plays in almost all of our problems in living. We must not fail to recognize sin and confront it. To do so would be to fail to love the person we are ministering to and to, ultimately, fail to love and honor God.

Similarly, this project has also strongly confirmed to me the importance of recognizing and addressing suffering. While it is fundamentally unloving to fail to recognize and address sin in another's life, it is equally unloving to fail to recognize and address suffering as well. Counseling cannot be solely (or even predominately) about addressing sin, for then our counsel would be relatively silent on the topic which the New Testament addresses at almost every turn: suffering. We see God's redemptive purposes for suffering all throughout Scripture in places like Job, Psalms, Jas 1, and 1 Pet just to name a few; and the exegesis discussed in the class sessions on this topic only further demonstrates this fact. And so, the pages of Scripture and content of this project have confirmed to me the importance of ministering hopefully and powerfully to others when they are suffering.

Lastly, this project has also given me a fresh appreciation for the essential pastoral role of equipping. As Ephesians 4:11-16 so powerfully conveys, one of the most fundamental roles for a pastor is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." Again, this conviction has been strengthened in two separate ways. First, the exegesis provided in chapter two of this project on this passage in Ephesians rid my heart of any doubt that this kind of equipping is one of the main activities I ought to be dedicated to as a pastor. Secondly, seeing the incredible fruit that has and will come from this equipping at Cornerstone Church has absolutely overwhelmed me. The amount of loving, gospel-saturated ministry that will take place as a result of the investment we have made in the lives of these servant ministers will far surpass the interpersonal ministry I could ever accomplish as a pastor. If I truly love those over whom God has given me care, equipping must be a top priority of my ministry.

## Personal Reflection

As I reach the conclusion of this research project, there are a great number of emotions and responses that well up in me. However, in reflecting upon where I stand now at the end of this journey, before God, there are three emotions that stick out.

I am humbled. I am humbled that God would so graciously open my eyes to see him and know him. I am humbled that he would care for me so much that he would rescue me from my sin and redeem my suffering. I am humbled that he would use me to convey the power of that same message to those who do not know it and those who have not fully internalize it. I am humbled that he would bless me with the opportunity to do the research presented in this project and the opportunity to equip others with the content of this project. I am humbled that my feeble efforts would somehow be used for his glory.

I am overwhelmed. I am overwhelmed at the enormity of the gospel and its implications for life. I am overwhelmed by the diversity and complexity of people and

their problems. I am overwhelmed with the stewardship of the truth and knowledge God has entrusted me with as represented in the content of this project. I am overwhelmed at the state of the evangelical church at large that is so often ignorant of the power of the gospel and sufficiency of Scripture. I am overwhelmed with the magnitude of God's work in the world that is represented, in such a miniscule way, by this project.

I am thankful. I am thankful for the opportunity to know God, be forgiven, be sanctified, and given hope in the midst of suffering. I am thankful for the gift of this project in my life and the lives of those around me. I am thankful for the sufficiency of Scripture, the mutual personal ministry of the body, and the constant empowering of the Holy Spirit. I am thankful for the powerful way in which the gospel ministers to all Christians both as they suffer and as they sin. I am thankful for God's gift of so many biblical pastoral theologians who have built the foundation upon which this project stands. And I am thankful for so innumerably much more.

## Conclusion

In the fall of 2011 this research project was conducted as the culmination of a year and a half of research and planning. The purpose and goals of the project were set forth and subsequently achieved. Similarly, the class itself was completed in December 2011 and fulfilled all of its designed requirements. While the immediate impact of this project on the participants was measured through the pre and post-class questionnaires, and its immediate impact on me was summarized in the previous two sections, the ultimate impact of the research and equipping represented in the last four chapters only God will know. It is my prayer that God would use this project as a seed that would bear spiritual fruit that will go unrecognized by us, but will bring him the ultimate glory.

It is for that reason that I do not view this conclusion as much as an end as it is a beginning. While this *is* the end of this project, the end of a season in life for me and my family, and the end of a significant investment of time and resources, I see this

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conclusion much more as a beginning. The work as represented in this project is just a beginning for the numbers of people who will be ministered to and counseled in light of its content. This work is just the beginning of the equipping and counseling ministry at Cornerstone Church. This work is just the beginning for the continued research and study I desire to do on these topics for the benefit of the those that are a part of Cornerstone Church, for I have never before realized just how little I know and how great and grand and complex are God's workings in the hearts of men. The conclusion of this project is, in so many ways, more a beginning than it is an end, and for that I truly am humbled, overwhelmed, and thankful.

APPENDIX 1

PRE AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE

**Agreement to Participate**
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge, wisdom, and confidence level in regards to the spiritual issues that will be covered in this class. This research is being conducted by Scott Mehl for purposes of evaluating the efficacy of this equipping class as part of a doctoral project. In this research, you will be asked to answer questions about your experience and knowledge level, as well as write out a response to a presented case study. 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**

Name:_____     Community Group:_____

Gender:_____     Age:_____

Years you have been a Christian:_____     Years at Cornerstone:_____

Highest level of education completed:
*HS     Associates     Bachelors          Masters          Doctorate*

Level of education you are currently pursuing:
*None   Associates     Bachelors          Masters          Doctorate*

**Depression**

How well do you think you understand the experience of depression?

*1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10*
*Not at All                                                        Very Well*

How well do you think you understand the nature (cause) of depression?

*1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10*
*Not at All                                                        Very Well*

How well do you think you know specific passages of Scripture that might help encourage or exhort someone struggling with depression?

*1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10*
*Not at All                                                        Very Well*

How confident would you feel ministering to someone who is struggling with depression?

*1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10*
*Not at All                                                        Very Confident*


Describe the experience of depression.




What is the nature (cause) of depression?




List up to five passages of Scripture you would turn to in order to minister to someone struggling with depression.




Have you ever struggled with depression?
*Yes        No        I don't know*


Have you ever walked with someone who was struggling with depression?
*Yes        No        I don't know*

**Sexual Issues**

How well do you think you understand the experience of sexual issues?

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10

*Not at All*                                   *Very Well*

How well do you think you understand the nature (cause) of sexual issues?

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10

*Not at All*                                     *Very Well*

How well do you think you know specific passages of Scripture that might help encourage or exhort someone struggling with sexual issues?

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10

*Not at All*                                     *Very Well*

How confident would you feel ministering to someone who is struggling with sexual issues?

1     2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9     10

*Not at All*                                     *Very Confident*

Describe the experience of sexual issues.

What is the nature (cause) of sexual issues?

List up to five passages of Scripture you would turn to in order to minister to someone struggling with sexual issues.

Have you ever struggled with sexual issues?

*Yes     No     I don't know*

Have you ever walked with someone who was struggling with sexual issues?

*Yes     No     I don't know*

**Eating Disorders**

How well do you think you understand the experience of eating disorders?
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
*Not at All*                                                    *Very Well*

How well do you think you understand the nature (cause) of eating disorders?
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
*Not at All*                                                    *Very Well*

How well do you think you know specific passages of Scripture that might help encourage or exhort someone struggling with eating disorders?
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
*Not at All*                                                    *Very Well*

How confident would you feel ministering to someone who is struggling with eating disorders?
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
*Not at All*                                                    *Very Confident*


Describe the experience of eating disorders.




What is the nature (cause) of eating disorders?




List up to five passages of Scripture you would turn to in order to minister to someone struggling with eating disorders.




Have you ever struggled with eating disorders?
*Yes     No     I don't know*


Have you ever walked with someone who was struggling with eating disorders?
*Yes     No     I don't know*

**Case Study (For Men)**

Jim is a Christian who you've known for a while now. He's been attending Cornerstone for about a year, and he's been regularly coming to your Community Group for the past 5 months. Jim was quiet at first, like most people usually are, but as he's become more comfortable he's become a lot of fun to be around. He's funny and likes to joke around, and he can have some really encouraging insights when you're discussing Sunday's sermon.

Jim has his struggles. He's confessed as much to the group when asking for prayer. His relationship with his parents isn't great, and his mom always wants him to come home more. His parents are divorced and they both live in Orange County. Jim tries not to spend too much time down there because his parents are always giving him a hard time about how much time he's spending with the other one. Sometimes it's hard for him to find joy at work because his job can seem so boring. He wants to connect with the people in his office and share Christ with them, but he doesn't know what to say, and he's not quite sure how to do it (kind of like you!) Overall, however, you're really encouraged by your friendship with Jim. He's a pretty solid guy.

Last week, as everyone was leaving from Community Group Jim hung back and waited for everyone to leave. He asked if he could talk to you for a minute. He tells you he's been having a pretty rough week and he's not sure what to do about it. As you ask a few probing questions, Jim begins to open up:

"Last weekend was *really* hard. I mean, I just don't understand it. I go through these valleys sometimes when I just feel so depressed and I don't know what to do. Friday night I just stayed home. I didn't want to do anything. I watched a movie, but that didn't even seem fun…so I just went to bed. I slept for 12 hours, but when I woke up I still didn't feel like getting up. In fact, I stayed in bed all day Saturday. I just laid there and never got up. I think my roommates just thought I wasn't home. I laid there all day and through Saturday night. I dragged myself out of bed Sunday morning because I knew I needed to go to church…but it was such a struggle. I didn't feel close to God, and I didn't really want to talk with anyone. This week things have gotten a little better. I've been able to get out of bed in the morning, although I've been late to work three times already. And I still just feel really depressed. This doesn't feel like me. I know I'm not supposed to feel like this, but I can't help it. I just felt like I should tell someone. Sorry to lay all this on you…I'm just not sure where else to go."

As you talk over the next few weeks you learn these things about Jim:
- He took anti-depressants in college and they worked for him, but he stopped because he thought he was "over it."
- Jim's dad was really angry, which is why his parents divorced. As a result of his dad's border-line abuse, his mom became extremely over-protective and still acts that way towards him.
- Jim feels guilty for being depressed. He feels that if he really loved God, this wouldn't happen.

**Case Study (For Women)**
Kendra is a Christian who you've known for a while now. She's been attending
Cornerstone for about a year, and she's been regularly coming to your Community Group
for the past 5 months. Kendra was quiet at first, like most people usually are, but as she's
become more comfortable she's become a lot of fun to be around. She's funny and likes
to joke around, and she can have some really encouraging insights when you're
discussing Sunday's sermon.

Kendra has her struggles. She's confessed as much to the group when asking for prayer.
Her relationship with her parents isn't great, and her mom always wants her to come
home more. Her parents are divorced and they both live in Orange County. Kendra tries
not to spend too much time down there because her parents are always giving her a hard
time about how much time she's spending with the other one. Sometimes it's hard for
her to find joy at work because her job can seem so boring. She wants to connect with
the people in her office and share Christ with them, but she doesn't know what to say,
and she's not quite sure how to do it (kind of like you!) Overall, however, you're really
encouraged by your friendship with Kendra. She's a pretty solid girl.

Last week, as everyone was leaving from Community Group Kendra hung back and
waited for everyone to leave. She asked if she could talk to you for a minute. She tells
you she's been having a pretty rough week and she's not sure what to do about it. As you
ask a few probing questions, Kendra begins to open up:

"Last weekend was *really* hard. I mean, I just don't understand it. I go through these
valleys sometimes when I just feel so depressed and I don't know what to do. Friday
night I just stayed home. I didn't want to do anything. I watched a movie, but that didn't
even seem fun…so I just went to bed. I slept for 12 hours, but when I woke up I still
didn't feel like getting up. In fact, I stayed in bed all day Saturday. I just laid there and
never got up. I think my roommates just thought I wasn't home. I laid there all day and
through Saturday night. I dragged myself out of bed Sunday morning because I knew I
needed to go to church…but it was such a struggle. I didn't feel close to God, and I
didn't really want to talk with anyone. This week things have gotten a little better. I've
been able to get out of bed in the morning, although I've been late to work three times
already. And I still just feel really depressed. This doesn't feel like me. I know I'm not
supposed to feel like this, but I can't help it. I just felt like I should tell someone. Sorry
to lay all this on you…I'm just not sure where else to go."

As you talk over the next few weeks you learn these things about Kendra:
- She took anti-depressants in college and they worked for her, but she stopped
  because he thought she was "over it."
- Kendra's dad was really angry, which is why her parents divorced. As a result of
  her dad's border-line abuse, her mom became extremely over-protective and still
  acts that way towards her.
- Kendra feels guilty for being depressed. She feels that if she really loved God this
  wouldn't happen.

**Given the limited information you have been provided with:**

What would you want to tell Jim / Kendra?

What do you think may be causing Jim / Kendra's depression?

Is this something you feel like you can handle?  If not, what would you do?

What would the next couple months look like as you and Jim / Kendra walk through this together?  Continue the story:

APPENDIX 2

WEEK 2 CLASS NOTES:
LISTENING TO DEPRESSION


The following is a sample of the class notes used during the research project.

These notes are provided as a reference for anyone who would desire to duplicate a

similarly structured equipping class.  This sample provides an example of how the

process of listening and understanding a specific spiritual problem was undertaken.  This

involved evaluating medical definitions, considering the facets of the personal

experience, considering the characteristics of the cultural experience, and reading a

number of different personal accounts.

Equipping Series

# Common Spiritual Issues

*The Gospel and Our Problems*

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**WEEK 2**

# Listening to Depression

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# Defining Depression

Write out a definition for depression from your perspective:

## *DSM-IV-TR Definitions*

**DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISOPDE**

Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest of pleasure.

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day.
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day.
3. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day.
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day
5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day.
6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day.
8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day.
9. Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.

**DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER**

1.  Presence of two or more Major Depressive Episodes
2.  Not better accounted for by:
    a.  Schizoaffective Disorder
    b.  Schizophrenia
    c.  Schizopreniform Disorder
    d.  Delusional Disorder
    e.  Psychotic Disorder
3.  There has never been a Manic Episode, a Mixed Episode, or a Hypomanic Episode.


**DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR DYSHYMIC DISORDER**

1.  Depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, as indicated either by subjective account or observation by others, for at least 2 years.
2.  Presence, while depressed, of two (or more) of the following:
    a.  Poor appetite or overeating
    b.  Insomnia or hypersomnia
    c.  Low energy or fatigue
    d.  Low self-esteem
    e.  Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
    f.  Feelings of hopelessness
3.  During the 2-year period of the disturbance, the person has never been without the symptoms in Criteria A and B for more than 2 months at a time.


**WHAT DOES "DYSTHYMIC" MEAN?**

*dys* – combining form meaning "ill," "bad," used in the formation of compound words

*thymia* – indicating a certain emotional condition, mood, or state of mind (from the Greek *thumos* for "temper."

Dysthymic Disorder = "Bad Mood Disorder"

# *Evaluating the DSM-IV Definitions*

What is helpful about these definitions?

What is harmful about these definitions?

> *"… the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (APA, 1994) represents a prescientific stage of development with respect to an attempt to bring taxonomic order to aberrant behavior phenomena, deemed psychopathological and hence the imputed manifestation of one or another form of mental disorder … the DSM approach to organizing the phenomena of disordered behavior is fundamentally flawed to the degree that research advance in the field is seriously hampered by its pervasive influence."*
> — **Robert Carson, in Placebo to Panacea, 99**

## WHAT'S IN A DEFINITION?

Key diagnostic component: "a depressed mood"

Depressed mood vs. Fever

> *"A concrete example of the implausibility of the conjunctive category ideal in this field is provided in the widespread occurrence of high levels of anxiety and depression as central features across the entire domain of psychopathology, as well as their frequent co-occurrence in individual cases of disorder…These manifestations appear to share a status not unlike that of fever in general medicine, rather than being, in themselves, categories of disorder, as the DSM would have it."* — **Robert Carson, in Placebo to Panacea, 105**

# Listening to Depression

## *The Importance of Listening*

Without listening we are like a mechanic who tries to fix a car based on what it won't do.

Without listening we are like a doctor who tries to operate without taking x-rays or MRIs

Without listening, even our best efforts at applying the truth of Scripture will be misapplied and misunderstood

# The Personal Experience of Depression

## *Descriptions from Others*

> *"Don't assume that you understand what someone means by 'depression.' Don't fill in the meaning from your own experience, which may or may not be similar.  Instead, listen.  Allow the depressed person to fill the word depression with the meaning it has for him or her."* – **Ed Welch, Blame it on the Brain, 117**

When approaching depression, one of the most important things we must do is *listen*.  What is it that this person is experiencing?  What are they *specifically* feeling? What do they fill the word *depression* with?

Following are some different descriptions of *depression,* what do you hear?

What could be included in the category "Depressed Mood"?

*"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*
*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*
*When shall I come and appear before God?*
*My tears have been my food day and night,*
*while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"*
*These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:*
*how I would go with the throng and*
*lead them in procession to the house of God*
*with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.*
*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*
*Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*
*My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you*
*from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*
*Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;*
*all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.*
*By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,*
*and at night his song is with me,*
*a prayer to the God of my life.*
*I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me?*
*Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"*
*As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me,*
*while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"*
*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*
*Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."* **– Psalm 42**

"*You would think that if your circumstances were better, you would be too. But, depression has a logic of its own. Once it settles in, it can't distinguish between a loving embrace, the death of a close friend, and the news that a neighbor's grass is growing.*

*Decisions? Impossible. The mind is locked. How can you choose? Nothing is working; the engine of your mind is barely turning over. And aren't most decisions emotional preferences? How can you decode when you have noe emotional preferences?*

*Certainty? The only certainty is that misery will persist. If certainty of any good thing ever existed – and you can't remember when it did – it is replaced by constant doubt. You doubt that you are loved by anyone. You doubt your spouse's intentions. You doubt your spouse's fidelity. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you doubt the presence of Christ. You doubt the very foundation of your faith...*

*The only thing you know is that you are guilty, shameful, and worthless. It is not that you have made mistakes in your life, or sinned, or reaped futility. It is that you are a mistake, you are sin, you are futility....God has turned his back. Why bother going on in such a state? You might as well join God and turn your back on yourself too.*" – **Ed Welch, *Depression***


"*Across the desk from me sat a young 30-somehting woman who had come to see me because she had lived with depression for five years. She wanted to talk about discontinuing her antidepressant medication. She was afraid that when she stopped the medicine she would not sleep, and she feared she would again descend into depression. Her physician and her friends had warned her not to quit the medication. She did not mind so much how her life was currently ordered, but she was curious about how it could change for the better. Like many who take antidepressant medications daily, she wondered what life might be like without them.*

*The young woman felt locked into a life that lacked emotional extremes. Her physician told her that his flatness of feeling was an improvement, but she stated that she often felt she was looking out from between the bars of an emotional prison. She wondered if the lows would be worth the heights that might result from discontinuing the medication. She felt as though she held the key to such an adventure, but she was afraid to use it.*" – **Charles Hodges, "Spiritual Depression"**

*"Someone says to you, "I love you." You hear … nothing. Actually you hear something. You hear a little voice in your brain that says, "I'm worthless. You're only saying you love me because you think you have to." Somehow, from the mouths of other people to your ear, all words of blessing and encouragement get tumbled upside down and backward and confirm your suspicions about yourself. You are an abject failure. Unloved. Unlovable. And everyone knows it.*

*There are hundreds of variations. "You look nice today." Push it through the filter of depression and you get, "Not true. I know I am ugly." Or, "You seem to be feeling a little better today." This means, "Oh, you don't want to talk to me anymore." This is your brain on depression. And we could add, it is your brain on shame.*

*If this internal circuitry reversed every word, a loved one could say, "You are really such a jerk," and you would hear, "I love you." But it doesn't work that way. Depression (or shame) corrupts every blessing and leaves the curses in their untouched, pristine form…*

*That was a warm-up. Now on to something more lethal. God says, "I love you." You hear, "God loves some people but he could never love me." Notice that you didn't hear, "I don't love you." That would be your inner filter doing its usual electronic voodoo and reversing any blessing. With this one, you don't even feel worthy to hear anything personal from the Lord. So what came out the other side was your own voice, not God's!*

*Do you think that, maybe, your wiring is completely messed up and you aren't hearing God accurately? "I love you," becomes "God could never love me." If someone else did that you would tell her she was crazy. But, somehow, for you, it makes perfect sense."* – **Ed Welch, Depression's Odd Filter**

### Describing a "Depressed Mood"

What could be included in the category "Depressed Mood"?

> *"We must be impressed by the fact that the forms which this particular condition may take seem to be almost endless. It comes in such different forms and guises that some people stumble at that very fact. They are amazed that there can be so many symptoms or manifestations of this one disease this spiritual condition; and, of course, their ignorance of the problem in and of itself may lead to the very condition we are considering."* – **D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression, 51**

What are the similarities between different peoples' "depressed moods"?

What are the similarities between one person's different bouts of "depressed moods"?

# The Cultural Experience in the World

## *The Normalcy of Depression*

> *"Even though antidepressant use has skyrocketed in recent years, the rate of depression in the United States hasn't declined: It's increased. According to the latest research, about one in four Americans – over seventy million people – will meet the criteria for major depression at some point in their lives. Ominously, the rate of depression has been on the rise for decades."* – Stephen Ilardi, The Depression Cure

## *The Mystery of Depression*

## *Theory of Chemical Imbalance*

The reigning cultural theory regarding the cause and incidence of depression is that it is caused by a chemical imbalance within the brain. This theory pervades popular culture as well as the church, and is a fairly accepted "fact" in American culture.

*"Current popular wisdom holds that depression most often is caused by a genetic disorder that results in chemical (neurotransmitter) imbalances in the human brain. Medical caregivers often consider these chemical imbalances to be beyond the control of afflicted individuals, but they believe that they can be remedied by the use of antidepressants."* – **Charles Hodges, Spiritual Depression**

This cultural theory is demonstrated by the prolific way in which anti-depressant medications are being prescribed.

*"The percentage of the US population using at least 1 psychotropic medication increased from 5.9% in 1996 to 8.1% in 2001. . . . Between 1996 and 2005, the overall annual rate of anti-depressant treatment among persons 6 years and older increased from 5.84 to 10.12 per 100 persons."* – **Olfson and Marcus, "National Patterns in Antidepressant Treatment"**

*"Rarely has a class of drugs transformed a field as dramatically as the SSRIs have transformed clinical psychopharmacology. Introduced in the late 1980s, most are now off patent, but not before becoming so widely prescribed within psychiatry, mental health, and primary care that up to six prescriptions per second, around the clock and around the year are said to be written for these agents."* – **Stephen Stahl, Essential Psychopharmachology**

However, the current research in neuroscience and psychopharmacology suggests that there is great complexity in the human brain, and that even the best research cannot simplify its processes. In fact, current research not only brings into doubt the possibility of a simple "chemical imbalance" theory, but rejects it.

*"Unfortunately, little progress has been made yet in defining the biological causes of mental illnesses by using these approaches [PET, CT, MRI, etc.]. No single reproducible abnormality in any neurotransmitter or in any of it enzymes or receptors has been shown to cause any common psychiatric disorder. Indeed, it is no longer considered likely that one will be found, given the complexity of psychiatric diagnosis and the profound interaction of environmental factors with genetics in psychiatric disorders."* – **Stephen Stahl, Essential Psychopharmachology**

*"Contemporary neuroscience research has failed to confirm any serotonergic lesion in any mental disorder, and has in fact provided significant counterevidence to the explanation of a simple neurotransmitter deficiency. Modern neuroscience has instead shown that the brain is vastly complex and poorly understood. While neuroscience is a rapidly advancing field, to propose that researchers can objectively identify a "chemical imbalance" at the molecular level is not compatible with the extant science. In fact, there is no scientifically established ideal "chemical balance" of serotonin, let alone an identifiable pathological imbalance. To equate the impressive recent achievements of neuroscience with support for the serotonin hypothesis is a mistake."* – **Lacasse and Leo, "Serotonin and Depression"**

*"With direct proof of serotonin deficiency in any mental disorder lacking, the claimed efficacy of SSRIs is often cited as indirect support for the serotonin hypothesis. Yet, this ex juvantibus line of reasoning (i.e., reasoning "backwards" to make assumptions about disease causation based on the response of the disease to a treatment) is logically problematic—the fact that aspirin cures headaches does not prove that headaches are due to low levels of aspirin in the brain."* – **Lacasse and Leo, "Serotonin and Depression"**

However, pharmaceutical companies (online or in their many advertisements) do not acknowledge this same complexity, and continue to promote antiquated theories that current science cannot support, continually widening the gap between the science of antidepressants and the cultural understanding of them.

**From the Zoloft Website:**

*"Zoloft is a prescription medicine that treats depression and anxiety. It belongs to a class of drugs known as SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). Zoloft works to correct a chemical imbalance in the brain that may be related to symptoms of depression or anxiety. It has been prescribed to millions of people for more than 15 years."* – **www.zoloft.com**

**From the Cymbalta Website:**

*"Although the exact way that Cymbalta works in people is unknown, it is believed to be related to an increase in the activity of serotonin and norepinephrine, which are two naturally occurring substances in the brain and spinal cord."* – **www.cymbalta.com**

# The Cultural Experience in the Church

There are also some unique cultural experiences when it comes to suffering depression as a Christian who is a part of the church.  Many Christians respond to depression differently, and oftentimes a cursory knowledge of Scripture can be more dangerous than helpful.

## *Is Your Depression Because of Your Sin?*

### Eliphaz

*As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number . . . Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.* (Job 5:8-9, 17)

### Bildad

*If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. . . . Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers.* (Job 8:5-6, 20)

### Zophar

*If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him.  If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents.  Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear.  You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away.*  (Job 11:13-16)

# *The Dilemma of Well-Known Biblical "Truths"*

## CHRISTIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE "HAPPY"

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love,  joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* (Galatians 5:22)

*Count it all  joy, my brothers,  when you meet trials of various kinds,* (James 1:2)

## CHRISTIANS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO "DESPAIR"

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

## CHRISTIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO DO "ALL THINGS"

*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13)

# *Other Responses You Have Experienced*

APPENDIX 3

WEEK 6 CLASS NOTES:
BIBLICAL NATURE OF SEXUAL ISSUES


The following is a sample of the class notes used during the research project. These notes are provided as a reference for anyone who would desire to duplicate a similarly structured equipping class. This sample provides an example of how the discussion of the biblical nature of a specific issue was undertaken. This involved identifying the contributing forms of suffering and sin to the specific problem, and then demonstrated the power and specific application of the person and work of Christ to both the suffering and sin involved. The application of the gospel is rooted in Scriptural passages so as to ground both one's counsel and one's theology deeply in the Word of God.

Equipping Series

# Common Spiritual Issues

*The Gospel and Our Problems*

**WEEK 6**

# Biblical Nature of Sexual Issues

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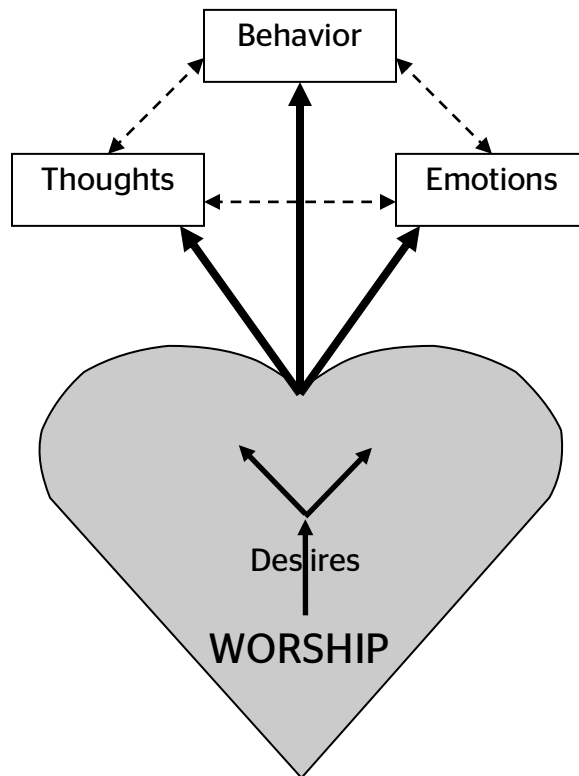
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# The Heart and Thoughts

Any observer of humans can see the interrelated nature between behavior, thoughts, and emotions.  In fact, much of secular psychology centers on arguments regarding which aspect of humanity is ultimately causative.

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                    Behavior
                   ╱        ╲
              Thoughts ←--→ Emotions
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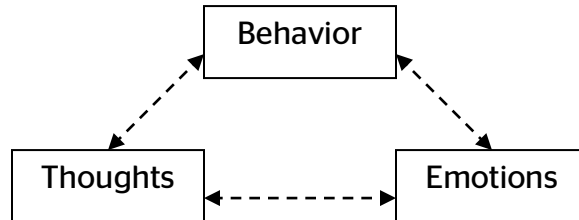
However, Scripture tells us that what is causative is our heart.  The heart is the seat of our deepest desires and is ultimately determined and driven by our worship.  What we worship determines how we think, behave, and feel.

```
                    Behavior
                   ╱    ↑    ╲
              Thoughts ←--→ Emotions
                   ╲    ↑    ╱
                  ╱  Desires  ╲
                      WORSHIP
```

## *Thoughts Spring From Desire*

       Ultimately, our worship of either ourselves or God is at the root of all of our thoughts, behavior, and emotions.  This worship, however, is made manifest in the form of our desires.  It is for this reason that the New Testament repeatedly refers to our "desires" as the cause of our temptation.  Our desires determine the different manifestations of our worship.

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*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.    Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* (James 1:14-15)

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*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to  his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.* (2 Peter 1:3-4)

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*But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self,  which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* (Ephesians 4:20-24)

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In fact, the idea of "desire" is even what is meant when we use the term "lust"

       *In English the word lust generally connotes lurid sexual fantasies. It is closely associated with the mental pictures of naked bodies to which males are so typically drawn.  This English meaning of lust, however has no equivalent word in New Testament Greek. The word translated lust in Matthew 5:28 (epithumia) means simply desire. On occasion the word, in fact, has a positive meaning as when Jesus tells his disciples that He has "desired with desire" (as the King James puts it) to eat the Passover meal with them (Luke 22:15). Clearly, Jesus does not mean that He has fantasized about the Passover meal, mentally drooling over the menu. [Desire] is not a sensual fantasy.  Jesus means that He has deeply longed for the occasion.*

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*The same Greek word is used to render the Hebrew word translated covet as in, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17, NIV).* **Here we strike at the heart of the problem of lust as the Bible conceives it: We want things that don't belong to us.** *Leave sex out of it entirely for the moment. We are not content with what we have. We want something more— and that desire drives us.* – **Tim Stafford, "Getting Serious About Lust," JBC (Spring 1995)**

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*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'    But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

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As David Powlison summarizes so well:

*An immoral act or fantasy—behavior—is a sin in itself. But such behavior always arises from desires and beliefs that dethrone God. Whenever I do wrong, I am loving something besides God with all my heart, soul, mind, and might. I am listening attentively to some other voice. Typically (but not always!), immoral actions arise in connection with erotic desires that squirm out from under God's lordship. But immorality results from many other motives, too, and usually arises from a combination of motives.* – **David Powlison, "Making All Things New"**
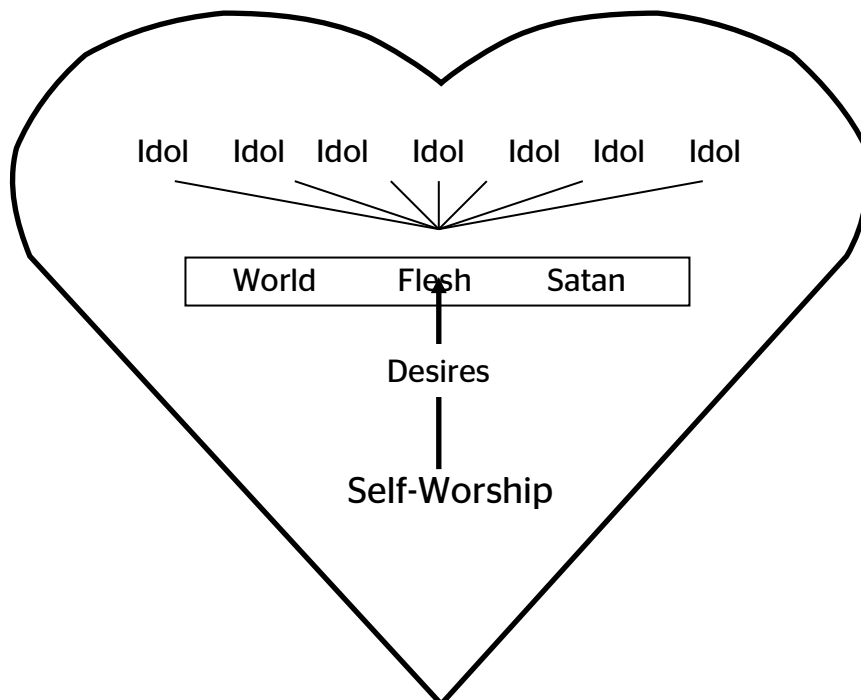
### *The Root of All Sexual Issues*

Therefore, at their core, all sexual issues are manifestations of self-worship through the lenses of our complicated and multifaceted desires. The similarities of various sexual issues not only exist in their experience, but exist in their ultimate nature as well.  In this way, all sexual issues have the same root and ought to be addressed with the same solution: the gospel.

This is a powerful truth that can help empower all of us to minister to those around us who struggle with sexual issues whether or not our struggles have directly mirrored theirs or not.

> *Gratefully, in time, I became open and accountable to a small group of Christians with whom I came to live out the truth that I was a sinner like everyone else.  It wasn't enough for me not to stigmatize myself; I needed to be known and upheld by fellow Christians.  One male friend's battle with heterosexual pornography, a woman's loneliness in the long absence of male suitors, another friend's need to give up a heterosexual relationship due to its immature, promiscuous nature – all three experiences resonated with mine and caused us to support each other meaningfully without my or anyone else's being tagged the pervert.* – **Andrews Comiskey, Pursuing Sexual Wholeness, 24-25**

# Sexual Issues are Caused by Suffering

## *Fallen Bodies*

Sexuality is drastically marred from birth.  Because of original sin, we are born into a world where our bodies and our sexual desires are already fallen and need to be redeemed.

> *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.   And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*  (Genesis 2:24-25)

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.* (Genesis 3:6-7)

## Fallen Culture

As we discussed earlier, the culture in which we live only perpetuates the sexual problems we have. In fact, in many ways, there are drastic effects of the culture upon our sexuality that we simply can't avoid. And, of course, there are many effects that we could avoid, but choose not to.

*Here's the mistake I have often made. I know that media contains a certain amount of sinful content that is dangerous. But instead of seeing how much I can avoid, I spend my energy trying to see how much I can handle. I'm like a person who figures out he can take half a poison pill every day without killing himself. It's good that he's not dying, but can it be healthy to take all those halves of poison pills?* – **Joshua Harris, Not Even a Hint, 118**

## Satan

Satan does not "possess" believers or force you to sin sexually...however, he does play the role of a counselor that will encourage and affirm the lies that you are tempted to believe.

*For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.* (2 Corinthians 2:9-11)

*The epistles concentrate their attention on what we properly call spiritual warfare: our vulnerability to be taken captive to Satan to believe his lies and do his will. They present moral evil as a three-stranded braid of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our social situation feeds us a stream of beguilements and threats; our own hearts gravitate to lies and lusts; the devil*

*schemes to aggravate sin and unbelief. Moral evil is also monolithic - the world, the flesh, and the devil work in concert. The bible differentiates the tree strands of monolithic evil without dividing them. The Bible never teaches that we have three sorts of problems: one set termed world problems, a second set identified as flesh problems, and a third set called 'spiritual' problems.* – **David Powlison, Power Encounters, 109**

## Others' Sin

Living among other sinners means that we are going to be sinned against. We are going to be hurt (often times very badly) by the sin of others, and it is going to affect our lives and our emotions. There are a couple of different ways that others' sin can impact us and our sexuality.

First, others' subtle, non-sexual, sin can impact our sexuality
- Parental neglect
- A cold and unaffectionate spouse
- Rejection by others of the opposite sex

Second, others' blatant sexual sin can impact our sexuality
- Molestation
- Rape
- Sexual Harassment

All of these things can be thought of as "shaping influences" in our lives that may not have a direct cause-effect relationship with our sexual issues, but cause suffering in our lives that are inevitably a part of the equation of these issues.

*Shaping influences are those events and circumstances in a child's developmental years that prove to be catalysts for making him the person he is. But the shaping is not automatic; the ways he responds to these events and circumstances determine the effect they have upon him. There is clear biblical warrant for acknowledging the lifelong implications of early childhood experience. The major passages dealing with family (Deuteronomy 6, Ephesians 6, and Colossians 3) presuppose these implications. The Scriptures demand your attention to shaping influences.* – **Tedd Tripp, Shepherding a Child's Heart, 10**

# Sexual Issues are Caused by Sinful Responses to Suffering

## *Anger*

When we respond to suffering in anger, we can oftentimes lash out sexually.  This may be in defiance of God and his rules, or in defiance of another authority figure (like parents).  In fact, what Scripture calls anger, we use a number of different terms for:

- Frustrated
- Annoyed
- Ticked off
- Upset

## *Pursuit of Affection*

When sinned against, we can react sinfully by pursuing affection from others through sexual means.  Whether in response to a neglect of affection or a past where we were given excessive sexual attention, we can respond by pursuing sexual affection from anyone who desires to give it.

## *Distorted Messianic Desires*

*I've dealt with a number of situations that involved the very impulses that make for ministry—run far off the rails. For example, a pastor feels deep concern for a lonely young widow or divorcée. He wants so much (too much) to help her and comfort her. She so appreciates his wise, Scriptural counsel. He's such a role model of kindness, gentleness, communication, attentive concern. But life is still very hard and lonely for her. He starts to console her with hugs. They end up in bed. The motives? Sexual, yes. But more significant in the early going was a warped desire to be helpful, to be admired, to make a real difference, to be important, to "save" her.*

*— David Powlison, "Making All Things New"*

### *Pursuit of Relief and Rest*

So many of our sexual issues seem to creep up at night and on the weekends. One of the reasons this is the case is because we are so often looking for relief from pain and rest from busyness in our sexuality.  You will notice, however, that relief and rest were not among the reasons that God created our sexuality.  This is a selfish, sinful use of our sexuality...regardless of the context.

*Sexual sin often serves as a kind of "escape valve" from other problems. When steam pressure gets too high in a pressure cooker, it blows off steam. That's a metaphor for what's often true with people, too.*– David Powlison, *"Making All Things New"*

# Sexual Issues are Caused by Sin

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.   And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.  But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* (Ephesians 5:1-3)

Reflecting on our previous discussions about desires, and the nature of the heart...how do you see immorality, impurity, and covetousness manifest in the different sexual issues?

Pornography

Individual Masturbation

Fantasies

Fetishes

Homosexuality

Adultery

Lust

Impotence / Frigidity

*I have seen two sinful attitudes creep into strugglers that precede giving in to lust; two voices, if you will. One says, "I deserve something." The other says, "I shouldn't have to go through this." The names of the two voices are pride and self-pity. They are the antithesis of a grateful heart.* – **Alan Medinger, "Queries and Controversies," JBC (Winter 1998)**

# The Gospel and Sexual Issues

## *Change is Possible / Expected*

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*Or do you not know that the unrighteous  will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,  nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.    And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

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*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?   By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?   Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?   We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.    We know that our old self  was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.    For one who has died has been set free  from sin.  Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.   We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.   For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.   So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.   Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.   For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*  (Romans 6:1-14)

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# The Gospel and Suffering

What does the gospel teach us about suffering and how we can relate to it as Christians?

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*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* (James 1:2-4, 12-14)

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Why is the struggler with sexual issues called to "joy"?

What does steadfastness look like in the midst of sexual issues?

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*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 1:3-7)

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Why is the struggler with sexual issues called to rejoice?

What could the rejoicing of a struggler with sexual issues entail?

*Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* (Romans 5:2-4)

What does suffering produce?

How does suffering produce what it produces?

How should we think of suffering when it does not produce what God says it will produce?

# The Gospel and Sin

*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* (Colossians 2:13-15)

What does this passage declare about the sexually struggling Christian?

# Three Instructions for Addressing Sin in the Sexual Struggler

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.   Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.   For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.   When Christ who is your  life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:  sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.   On account of these the wrath of God is coming.   In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.   But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.   Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self  with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.   Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,  free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,   bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.   And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.    (Col 3:1-14)*

## SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE

## PUT TO DEATH WHAT IS EARTHLY (IDOLATRY)

## PUT ON CHRISTLIKENESS

*First things first: think on things above. Salvation is offered in Jesus—in His life, death, and resurrection. He forgives us for our lusts; He justifies us from our lusts; and He sends His Spirit to sanctify us from our lusts. Life in the Spirit transforms us. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, a result of the Spirit-filled life. Paul's promise to the Galatians is clear and optimistic, if maddeningly general: "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16, NIV). .–* **Tim Stafford, "Getting Serious About Lust," JBC (Spring 1995)**

APPENDIX 4

WEEK 10 CLASS NOTES:
"TRUTHING" EATING STRUGGLERS

The following is a sample of the class notes used during the research project. These notes are provided as a reference for anyone who would desire to duplicate a similarly structured equipping class. This sample provides an example of how the description of "truth in love" was presented to the class. This description involved fairly in-depth looks at what it means to know, serve, speak to, and train in righteousness someone who is struggling with a particular issue. While the structure is meant to be portable, each issue discussed provided an opportunity for its own unique application of these principles based on the needs and dynamics of that particular problem.

Equipping Series
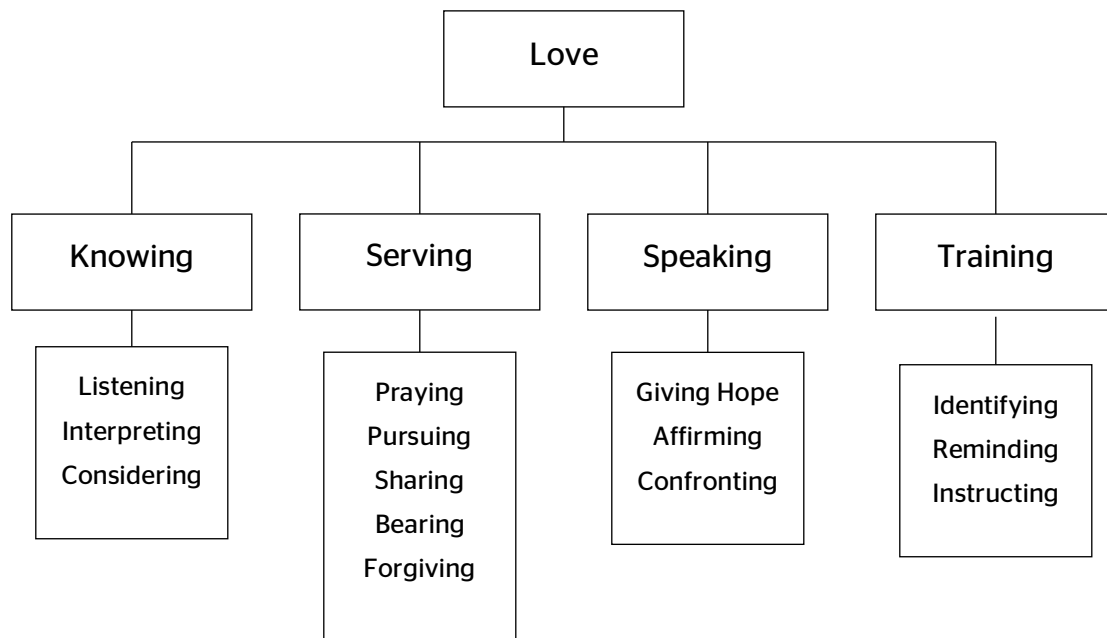
# Common Spiritual Issues

*The Gospel and Our Problems*

**WEEK 10**

# "Truthing" Eating Strugglers

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**cornerstone** +
WEST LOS ANGELES

# "Truthing" in Love

*And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.* (Ephesians 4:11-16)

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                              │     Love     │
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                                     │
        ┌────────────────┬───────────┴────────────┬────────────────┐
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  │ Listening │    │  Praying  │          │Giving Hope│     │Identifying│
  │Interpreting│   │ Pursuing  │          │ Affirming │     │ Reminding │
  │Considering│    │  Sharing  │          │Confronting│     │Instructing│
  └───────────┘    │  Bearing  │          └───────────┘     └───────────┘
                   │ Forgiving │
                   └───────────┘
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# Knowing in Love

Knowing vs. Knowing in Love

## *Considering What is Most Needed*

At any given moment, there may be a number of different words or actions that are needed in the life of a struggler.  Whether it is regular accountability, the removal of availability, or simply strong confrontation, it is your job as a friend and a counselor (aided and empowered by the Holy Spirit) to determine what is most needed in the life of the person you are ministering to.

# Serving in Love

## *Excursus: The Involvement of Medical Personnel*

Unlike some of the other spiritual issues people in the church will deal with, eating disorders can pose a significant and immediate health risk.  Starvation of any kind carries with it significant physical damage and the risk of death.  At times hospitalization may even be required to address the nutritional deficiencies in a person.

It is for this reason that medical personnel, preferably the sufferer's personal physician, should always be an important part of the recovery process.  While those in the church are equipped to address the heart issues at work, they are not equipped to evaluate and treat the physical problems that arise from this issue.

> *It is essential that the teen get a thorough physical.  A physician will be able to tell if weight loss or vomiting is from some other problem besides anorexia or bulimia, and the doctor can also determine any physical complication that has already occurred.*
>
> *A nutritionist will be able to provide up-to-date nutritional education, monitor food intake and patterns of eating, and construct a meal plan that will be healthy for the teen. – Clinton and Clark, Counseling Teens, 130*

This oftentimes ought to include an even larger team than just a physician, but should include a nutritionist, and others with particular practical expertise.

> *[I am] in favor of a holistic approach. This approach encompasses meeting the identified, individualized needs of the counselee through an understanding and assessment of the interrelationship of spiritual, psychological, physiologic, social and cultural processes. This ideal situation includes the active participation of an interdisciplinary process that facilitates the coordination of pastoral, medical, nursing, social service, and occupational therapy goals and interventions. This implies that the competent and knowledgeable biblical counselor must be Included as an Integral member of the team. It is deemed unwise, unprofessional, unbiblical and even foolish to approach the problem without knowledgeable medical intervention.* – Henry Eagleton, "Counseling and Conceptualizing the Bulimic," 4-5

## Praying

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.* (Galatians 5:22-25)

## Pursuing

Ministry to those who are struggling with eating disorders will inevitably require pursuit on your part. Sin causes shame, and shame leads to hiding. Because eating disorders are such a "secret" sin, an additional level of pursuit will be required. Of course, it is important to be around the person, but pursuing them in the area of their eating will be equally important.

> *There is an obsessive, desperate quality to the first-person accounts of eating disorders that I have read. Furthermore, when I typed "eating disorders" into my search engine, I found literally thousands of websites, many of which offered to help others overcome their disorders as the authors of those sites had done. Throughout these accounts there runs a thread – actually it is more like a rope – that characterizes virtually each of*

*the victims of disorder: an intense longing for connection with other people. In literally no case did any victims of eating disorders feel a strong sense of community with others; in many cases, women attribute their success at overcoming the hell of eating disorders to the loving relationship of someone who would not give up on them.* – **L. Shannon Jung, Food for Life, 67**

## Sharing

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.   But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?   Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.* (1 John 3:16-18)

The kind of sharing "giving" that many who struggle with eating disorders will need is not in terms of actual finances or possessions, but more in terms of time and energy. However, finances may be involved if the person can only afford fast food, or needs help to establish good eating habits.

## Bearing

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*  (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Those who are struggling with their eating will most definitively require a long, consistent, loyal relationship.  This is oftentimes very hard for us to provide because we are more interested in quick fixes and low-maintenance relationships.  However, this preference is *not* Christ-like love.

## Forgiving

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,   bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* (Colossians 3:12-13)

# Speaking in Love

## *Giving Hope*

Even in the face of the most serious and long-lasting eating disorders, there is hope for change.  One of the discouragements that is consistent for those with eating disorders (or even simply disordered eating) is a feeling of hopelessness.  Our beauty obsessed culture is oppressing.  Food is everywhere.  You have to eat to survive.  And you feel like you can't escape it.  Into this darkness God whispers a simple but penetrating affirmation: "There is hope."  As those who love and minister to others, that whisper ought to be on our lips as well.

### GOD'S PROMISES (A SELECTION)

- God is powerful (Job 42:2)
- God is good (Ps 107:1-2)
- God calms fears (Ps 56:3-4)
- God comforts (2 Cor 1:3-4)
- God works all things for our ultimate Good (Rom 8:28-29)
- God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9)
- God will complete the work he has begun in us (Phil 1:6)
- God has forgiven us completely (Rom 8:1-4)
- God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13)

### THE GOSPEL PRODUCES HOPE

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.  Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.  More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* (*Romans 5:1-5)*

## *Affirming*

The lives of Christians who are struggling with their eating will, most often, still include spiritual fruit in other aspects of life.  These manifestations of the Spirit's work ought to be encouraged and affirmed.  When steps of obedience are taken in the area of eating, even if the process of change has not been completed, affirmation ought to be a constant and encouraging presence.

There should always be a consideration to what words are most needed to minister to a struggler based on our interpretation of the proble

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*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

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## *Confronting*

We also must confront eating issues when they are present and not leave them unchecked.  We can not truly be loving those around us and fail to confront the sin in their lives.  This is a significant exhortation to heed, especially in light of the tendency in the church to ignore eating problems and fail to lovingly confront about them.  Oftentimes, loving confrontation is replaced by passive-aggressive comments or jokes which fail to edify and cannot be motivated by love.

Eating issues spring from idolatry, which ought to never go un-confronted in a brother or sister's life.

## *What Not to Say*

Because of the unfamiliarity some people have with eating disorders, there can be a tendency (especially in the church) to say incredibly insensitive things, even if unintentionally.  We ought to be careful with our words, constantly cognizant of their impact on our hearers.  An example of the types of comments we ought to avoid would include:

• "You don't look like you have an eating disorder."

• "If you think you're fat...you must be crazy."

• "It's obvious you have an eating problem."

•

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*There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,*
*but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* (Proverbs 12:18)

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# Training in Love

What is the ultimate goal in walking with someone with an eating disorder?

> The pragmatic goal: begin eating healthy / appropriately

> The physical goal: maintain a "healthy" weight

> The ultimate biblical goal: glorify God and become more like Christ

In order to truly address eating disorders, we must do more than simply "eating right."  We must address the heart that our thoughts and behaviors are coming from.  Our eating can be a manifestation of our worship of God, but when we are manifesting what we have identified as "eating issues" it is inevitably the product of a self-worshipping heart.

## *Identifying Self-Worship*

Helping the person with an eating disorder to identify self-worship in the midst of their struggle is one of the most compassionate things a brother or sister can do.  Eating disorders inevitably stem from self-worship, and helping the struggler to both see that, and to see the desires that are ruling their hearts will lead them to confession and repentance.

> *Worship is first an identity before it becomes an activity.  That is, you and I are worshippers, which is why we worship.  Our hearts are always under the control of something, and whatever controls your heart will also control your behavior.*
> — **Lane and Tripp, Relationships: A Mess Worth Making**

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*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*  (Matthew 15:19)

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Idol   Idol   Idol   Idol   Idol   Idol   Idol

World     Flesh     Satan

Desires

Self-Worship
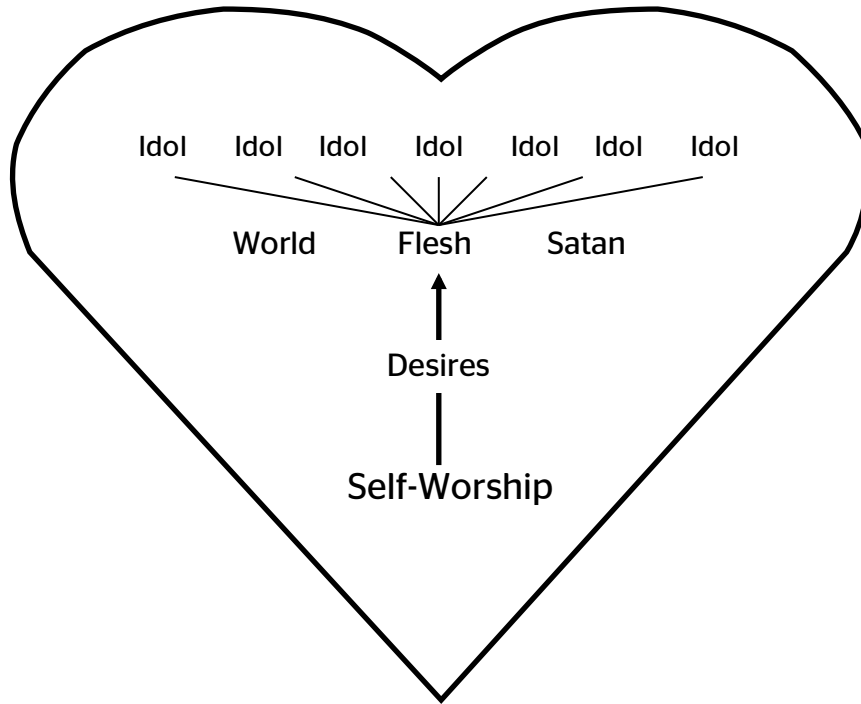
*If "idolatry" is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then "desires" is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for the same drift….Interestingly (and unsurprisingly) the New Testament mergers the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires. Idolatry becomes a problem of the heart, a metaphor for human lust, craving, yearning, and greedy demand. –* **David Powlison, Idols of the Heart and "Vanity Fair"**

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* (James 1:12-15)

# *Reminding of Gospel-Truths*

When addressing eating disorders, it can be easy to assume that just because someone is a Christian they have already fully internalized the gospel, and now all they need to do is obey.  But, our obedience to Christ is never that simple!  Obedience without gospel-motivation is simply moralism, and will cause our hearts to simply find more culturally acceptable outlets for our idolatry (which is often how unhealthy eating can begin in the first place).  If we are concerned with true hart change, we must not skip over the "renewing" of our minds through reminders of gospel-truths.

*Sanctification is never advanced by self-focused grief or guilt.  It is energized by joy and driven by love.  This is the distinction that gospelized sanctification emphasizes.  Only a remembrance of the gospel will free us from our habitual grief and guilt.  Only the gospel can implant the joy and love in our hearts that will free, motivate, and inspire us.* – **Fitzpatrick and Johnson, Counsel from the Cross, 118**

Who is God the Father?

Who is Jesus?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Who are You?

What has God done for you?

*Spending time in the gospel before we spend time in the law will create within us a renewed attitude informed and motivated by love.  If the message of the gospel does not inform every thought, word, and deed, our striving to put off and put on will disintegrate into another way to gain the approval of others, ourselves, and even the Lord.* – **Fitzpatrick and Johnson, Counsel from the Cross, 108**

## COLOSSIANS

*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* (Colossians 2:8-15)

You have been filled in Christ

Your past life has been buried with Christ

You have been resurrected through faith

You have been made alive

You have been forgiven

The "rulers and authorities" have been disarmed

## EPHESIANS

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.* (Ephesians 1:3-14)

You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing

You have been chosen by God

You are holy and blameless before him

You have been adopted

You have been redeemed through his blood

You have been forgiven according to the riches of his grace

You have obtained an inheritance

You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit to guarantee your inheritance

## 1 PETER

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* (1 Peter 1:3-5)

You have been born again

You have been given and imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance

You are being guarded by God's power for a salvation ready to be revealed

# *Instructing in Gospel-Commands*

The person who is struggling with eating disorders has a number of commands that they are to be called to in response to the gospel.  Most fundamentally, they are to abstain from idolatrous behavior, and to pursue self-control and love.  Just as is the case for all commands God has given us, the commands against eating disorders can be summarized quite simply: love God above all, and love others as you would love yourself.

In addition, however, there are also specific imperatives that would apply to the application of eating in Scripture.  An example of some of the applicable imperatives are provided here:

## IMPERATIVES TO PUT ON

‣ Self-control (Pro 25:28; Gal 5:23; 1 Tim 2:9)

‣ Contentment (1 Tim 6:6-8; Phil 4:11)

‣ Self-discipline (Gal 5:16-24)

‣

‣

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## ESTABLISHING A PLAN

In addition to identifying the imperatives that need to be put on, it is also incredibly important to identify a plan to obey those imperatives.  For someone who has been living, thinking, and eating a certain way for months and years, changing is no small endeavor.  For this reason, a gospel-motivated plan ought to be put in place to help the struggler grow from enslaved eating towards walking in freedom, manifesting God-worshipping intuitive eating.  Again, this kind of intuitive eating will not be able to be attained overnight, but ought to be the goal of a real and practical plan.

## COLOSSIANS

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Colossians 3:1-14)

## EPHESIANS

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...*

*Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* (Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32)

## 1 PETER

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls....*

*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."...*

*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;* (1 Peter 1:6-9, 14-16)

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING SERVANT MINISTERS OF CORNERSTONE CHURCH
IN WEST LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, TO ADDRESS
COMMON SPIRITUAL ISSUES

Scott Harper Mehl, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Heath B. Lambert

This project seeks to equip servant ministers of Cornerstone Church in West Los Angeles to address three specific spiritual problems, namely depression, sexual issues, and eating disorders. Chapter 1 describes the basis and plan for this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of five passages foundational to this kind of ministry. Chapter 3 evaluates the contributions of biblical pastoral theology, Christian integrative psychology, and secular psychiatry to understanding and addressing these issues. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content of the specific classes taught. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the specified goals.

Ultimately, this project seeks to demonstrate the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ to address spiritual and emotional issues. In addition, this project equips servant ministers that they may lovingly mutually minister to others with the truth of the gospel both as they suffer and as they sin.

VITA

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MINISTERIAL
       Director of College Ministry, Cornerstone Church, Simi Valley, CA, 2002-04
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