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INTRODUCING LEADERS TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING  
AT MOUNT ARARAT BIBLE CHURCH  
IN NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA

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A 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  
Roger Edward Bayramian  
May 2020

**APPROVAL SHEET**

INTRODUCING LEADERS TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING  
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To my wife, Lilit, and our two children,  
Noelle and Calvin

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## PREFACE

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Third, I would like to thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Stuart Scott, whose guidance, wisdom, and encouragement helped strengthen this project. You challenged me to be theologically precise in my writing so that I could clearly communicate truth. Your example of humility and love for God's Word encourages me in my walk with the Lord.

Fourth, I thank my professors at Southern Seminary, who have shaped my understanding of biblical counseling. Dr. Jeremy Pierre, Dr. Robert Jones, and Dr. Stuart Scott all contributed to a more robust understanding of people, problems, and hope in Christ. It was a privilege to learn from these men, and the Lord used these professors to help me see my own need to grow and change.

Finally, I am grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who pursued me when I was lost (Rom 5:8) and opened my heart to realize that I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great Savior. The Lord has outpoured grace upon grace in my life (John 1:16)

and truly has done more than I could ever imagine (Eph 3:20). May this project glorify the only one whose name is worthy of praise and be a tool for drawing those at MABC into a closer relationship with Jesus. The completion of this project once again reveals the Lord's faithfulness. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam 3:22-23).

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Santa Clarita, California

May 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The mission of Mount Ararat Bible Church (MABC) is “to build a community of worshippers of the triune God: equipping each for ministry, fostering spiritual growth and fellowship, and evangelizing the lost in our community and beyond.”<sup>1</sup> The pastors and elders fulfill this mission by training up the body to serve Jesus and others. This conviction comes from the words of the apostle Paul: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).<sup>2</sup> Paul’s admonition is a call for church leaders to disciple each member for growth in Christ. One aspect of growing in Christ is teaching members to speak the truth in love to one another so that the body grows up in love (Eph 4:15-16). Biblical counseling supports the mission of MABC by providing believers with the knowledge and ability to apply the Scriptures to real problems with biblical solutions.

#### **Context**

MABC began in 2015 when two longtime pastors of another local church left to plant a new church. The pastors could not support a proposed by-laws revision which caused deep divisions within the leadership. They believed that the church was heading in a direction that was no longer being faithful to the Bible. Due to the impasse over the by-laws, the pastors believed they needed to leave. The pastors prepared resignation letters at the request of the board. They planned to leave within six months of their resignation but

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<sup>1</sup> Mount Ararat Bible Church, “Mission,” accessed July 6, 2019, <https://mountabc.org/mission/>.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

were abruptly told they had three weeks to end their service at the church. Some members from the church followed these men to begin a new work. Although I was serving in a different church, one of the pastors invited me to help in this work. I, along with five other men, went through an elder training process, and I was one of three men the congregation elected as a lay elder. Since 2015, MABC has grown significantly and a typical weekly gathering involves more than 120 people, including children.

The primary ethnicity of the church is Armenian. The Armenian culture has affected the congregation's understanding of counseling. Culturally, families place a high value on education and those in professional fields receive honor. The average attendee has a college degree and is employed in a professional field, including psychology. Those who are educated and have credentials are recognized as "professionals" and "experts." Professionals who do counseling are those trained as psychologists, psychiatrists, or therapists. Many have sought help from secular therapy, while at the same time asking for counsel from their pastors. Simply, many have never considered the question of the sufficiency of Scripture to address human problems. There is an opportunity to strengthen confidence in how the Word of God addresses human problems.

Through a common commitment to the authority of Scripture, MABC is thriving. Scripture shapes the elders' preaching and leadership and informs the congregation's fellowship and unity. While some members, especially those of older generations, are reluctant to discuss their needs, the people of MABC are very involved in weekly ministries and are committed to walk with one another through life's trials and difficulties; yet this commitment has sometimes outpaced their ability and knowledge to provide such care and led to several situations where members have been referred to counselors outside of the church. For some members such outside referral seems to be their culturally-preferred approach, yet the elders are coming to see how the Bible can help people with their problems.

One area where MABC needs to grow is that of helping leaders understand

how biblical counseling addresses the difficulties of life. Many are doing counseling, although they would not use the term. The weekly ministries help strengthen believer's knowledge of the Word of God, but there exists a disconnect from how sound theology is related to the issues of life. Some of the counseling knowledge comes from life experiences, personal preferences, and wisdom gained through life. Introducing leaders to an understanding of biblical counseling helps initiate more intentional discipleship, showing leaders how to apply the Bible to their lives. This creates a culture of counseling so that members find hope first in God's Word, instead of referring to secular sources. The central need driving this project was to introduce leaders to how the Bible should be used to counsel one another.

The elders support biblical counseling and many in the congregation are more comfortable sharing their struggles. This is an opportunity to create a culture where members seek biblical solutions to their problems. The elders desire to counsel in the context of the church, rather than outsourcing to others. There is a great need for the leaders to grow in their understanding of biblical counseling, so that many will find hope in God's Word and grow in maturity in Christ.

### **Rationale**

The elders at MABC are committed to the ministry of God's Word and faithful shepherding of the congregation. This includes teaching, equipping for the work of the ministry, and caring for the souls of those who attend. Regular expository teaching has laid a solid foundation and trust in the Word of God. However, there is often a gap of knowing and doing, applying theology to all areas of life (Jas 1:22). Biblical counseling fills this gap by showing how the Scriptures apply to life. The church has grown, and more people are being open with the difficulties they face in life. The elders desire to see a community where other leaders (including themselves) learn how to counsel more effectively, so that the members will understand how the Bible can help address their

problems in life. As biblical counseling is strengthened in the church, more people are helped and see the power and sufficiency of the Word of God.

Paul makes a statement regarding the goal of his ministry to the Colossian church. He says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). Biblical counseling supports this goal by using the private ministry of God’s Word to warn and teach. Teaching the Scriptures is more than just imparting knowledge, it also includes applying that knowledge to real life. Biblical counseling is necessary to help bring about maturity in the lives of people, by helping believers live out the truths of Scripture. There are many people who know truth but have not connected what they know to their lives. This is seen in the many difficulties that the members face: marital strife, conflict between members, pornography, addictions, and many other difficulties that are results of a broken world.

The Bible is sufficient to handle the problems that Christians experience. Growth is not merely by one’s willpower, but through the Word of God and in the power of the Spirit. Peter states, “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” (2 Pet 1:3). The hope of the gospel is not just forgiveness of sins and an eternity in glory, but also includes a transformed life in the present. The Bible carefully applied can provide resources to help in ways that many at MABC have not considered. Many have sought outside help from therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Although some have found temporary relief, they still have not found solutions that satisfy their souls. The means, methods, and goals of biblical counseling are different than other solutions. Many have not considered biblical solutions to their problems in life.

The members of MABC are also called to practice the ministry of the Word, counseling one another. Paul exhorted Christians, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we

are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15). For the body to grow in maturity, the members must speak the truth in love to one another. Everyone will go through difficulties in life (personal sin, being sinned against, suffering) and the body of Christ needs to be prepared to apply the Word of God to all these situations. Many at MABC have vast knowledge of the Bible, and biblical counseling can help enhance how to apply that knowledge. Some have tried caring for others, but they find that they are not equipped to handle the difficulties of others. Some believe that they need “professional help” and have not considered how the Bible may apply to the difficulties of life.

Finally, the elders desire to care for the body instead of having to refer to outside help. At times other sources can assist, but the primary responsibility should be the local elders and congregation caring for its members. The Lord has blessed MABC with sound teaching, and biblical counseling will enhance the understanding of biblical solutions.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to introduce leaders at Mount Ararat Bible Church in Northridge, California, to biblical counseling so that a culture of counseling one another will be strengthened in the church.

### **Goals**

The following three goals guided this project:

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge and disposition toward counseling among leaders at MABC.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to introduce leaders to biblical counseling.
3. The third goal was to increase knowledge and alter dispositions of leaders at MABC by teaching the curriculum.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this project included a pre-survey, a post-survey, and an evaluation rubric.<sup>3</sup> Three goals determined the effectiveness of the project.

The first goal was to assess a group of leaders for their current level of knowledge and disposition toward counseling. Leaders include pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, community group leaders, and others who serve in roles of leading others. The pre-survey assessed both the knowledge and disposition towards counseling. The survey addressed the participants knowledge and feelings towards both biblical and secular counseling. This goal was measured by a pre-survey to fifteen leaders and was administered before the first week of training. The survey was available electronically using Google Forms. Hardcopy was available as needed. An e-mail link for the survey was provided to participants. Any hardcopy surveys were returned directly to me at church. The survey provided an option to be anonymous and participants needed to provide a four-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN). The survey included 23 questions, 3 open-ended questions and 20 questions regarding counseling knowledge and disposition. A six-point Liker scale was utilized. The survey took 15–20 minutes to complete. This goal was considered successfully met when fifteen leaders completed the survey and the results were compiled. The survey data helped give an understanding of the participants' knowledge of and disposition toward counseling so that the curriculum could be adjusted to most effectively address any areas of confusion or disagreement.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that would introduce leaders to biblical counseling. The curriculum addressed introductory topics of biblical counseling, such as (1) the sufficiency of Scripture, (2) the role of the Holy Spirit, (3) the importance of the heart, and (4) Christ-centered redemptive solutions to sin

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<sup>3</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.



and suffering. This goal was to be measured by an expert panel consisting of the senior pastor at MABC, a local member of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), and a seminary professor in biblical counseling. The evaluation utilized a rubric to evaluate biblical faithfulness, clarity, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase knowledge and alter dispositions of leaders at MABC by teaching the curriculum. The curriculum was taught in eight sessions. The length of the sessions was one and a half hours and included a time of teaching and discussion. The sessions were recorded for those who could not attend. Handouts were provided in each session along with recommended reading for the time between sessions. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey using the same Counseling Assessment (CS) that was used in the pre-survey. The survey was sent out within one week of the final course. The survey was available electronically using Google Forms. An e-mail link for the survey was provided to participants. Hardcopy was available as needed. Any hardcopy surveys were returned directly to me at church. The survey required the same name or PIN that was submitted with the pre-survey. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

*Biblical counseling.* Biblical counseling is important for discipleship as believers in community are called to care for one another. Believers in community are to speak the truth in love to one another (Eph 4:15), caring for one another's souls. According to David Powlison, "Wise counseling is essentially a way of loving another person well. It is a way of speaking what is true and constructive into this person's life

right now. Good counseling is essentially wise love in action.”<sup>4</sup> Bob Kellemen extends the definition of biblical counseling as follows:

Biblical counseling is Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed one-another ministry that depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s inspired truth about people, problems, and solutions to human suffering (through Christian sustaining and healing) and sin (through Christian reconciling and guiding) to empower people to exalt and enjoy God and to love others (Matthew 22:35-40) by cultivating conformity to Christ and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ, leading to a community of one-another disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20).<sup>5</sup>

*Sufficiency of Scripture.* The sufficiency of Scripture is an important foundational truth for understanding biblical counseling. John Street says, “The inspired and inerrant Word of God is the only authoritative source by which we can know absolute truth. It is totally sufficient to address any issue of which it speaks and for which it claims to be sufficient.”<sup>6</sup> For specific counseling practice Wayne Mack specifies, “For counseling to be worthy of the name of Christ, the counselor must be conscientiously and comprehensively committed to the sufficiency of Scripture for understanding and resolving all of the non-physical personal and interpersonal sin-related difficulties of man.”<sup>7</sup>

*Heart.* The term *heart* can often be confused due to the way it is used in modern language. In the Bible, the heart represents the inner man. Jeremy Pierre explains the terms for the heart in the Bible as “heart, soul, spirit, mind, and more—to describe a simple, singular human experience.”<sup>8</sup> Further, the heart can be described as a unified

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<sup>4</sup> David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 36.

<sup>6</sup> John Street, “An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling” (lecture, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, Fall 2005), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne A. Mack, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (1998): 65.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience*

object that responds three-dimensionally (thinking, affections, and choosing).<sup>9</sup> Michael Emlet says, “The word ‘heart’ captures the totality of the fundamental moral nature of a human being as creature-before-Creator.”<sup>10</sup>

The project was limited by the number of leaders interested and available for the counseling training. Leaders include pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, community group leaders, and others who serve in roles that lead others. Many of the anticipated leaders are involved in various areas in the church, and the training required a commitment to attend each session for the duration of the training.

The project involved several delimitations. It provided basic counseling knowledge in order that counseling would be strengthened in the church, both informally and formally. The participants would need more in-depth training and supervision which could lead to certification. The training provided basic knowledge of biblical counseling, but much more in-depth study would be necessary for formal counseling.

### **Conclusion**

Biblical counseling is important in helping believers find hope for the sin and suffering that is experienced in the Christian life. Introducing leaders to biblical counseling can create a culture so that members find hope in God’s Word and Spirit, and not in the secular methods of change. The focus on the heart is an important concept for counseling, which helps believers see the source of their problems. Instead of dealing with external behavior, biblical counseling focuses on the internal problem with the heart and the hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

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(Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre, *Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Michael R. Emlet, “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 47-52.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CENTRALITY OF THE HEART IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

“Johnny, why did you hit your sister?” a young mother asks her son. “I don’t know,” the boy says to his mommy. In 2017, Stephen Paddock opened fire at a Las Vegas concert, killing fifty-eight people and injuring hundreds. The motive for the crime remains a mystery and the typical answer from the media is that he was mentally ill.<sup>1</sup> This answer has become so common that it is frivolous and unsatisfying to explain the motives behind behavior. Humans beings desire an explanation for behavior, whether it explains something as common as sibling rivalry or as complex as mass murder. The study of psychology attempts to offer explanation by giving two perspectives:

Why do we do what we do? Why are we the way we are? What makes us different from each other? These kinds of questions naturally intrigue us. Historically, they have been approached through one of two perspectives. First, the nature perspective suggests that human behavior is driven mostly by biology (evolution, genetics, brain chemistry, and hormones). In contrast, the nurture perspective suggests that behavior is driven mostly by the psychosocial environment (for example, how we were raised, our peers, the situations we are in at present).<sup>2</sup>

The nature-versus-nurture debate is a common way of understanding human behavior. The nature perspective emphasizes biology as the primary cause, which means that the person is not responsible for their actions. The nurture perspective emphasizes the influence of others as the primary cause, which means that others can be blamed. Both perspectives remove human responsibility and guilt. Humans beings are body-soul

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<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Romo, “Police End Las Vegas Shooting; No Motive Found,” NPR, August 3, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/03/635507299/las-vegas-shooting-investigation-closed-no-motive-found>.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Tix, “Why Do We Do What We Do?” *Psychology Today*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-pursuit-peace/201610/why-do-we-do-what-we-do>.

creatures that are affected by both their body and the environment around them. Although nature and nurture have an influence on people, they are not deterministic. Biblical counseling offers more insight into the cause of behavior, viewing people as created in the image of God; as such, they are both responsible and accountable.

Biblical counseling provides an answer to human sin and suffering that the world cannot offer. One of the primary distinctions of biblical counseling is the centrality of the heart as the source and cause for behavior. This does not deny the influence of biological and physical issues to behavior, but rather it teaches that behavior is connected to the heart. Even though physical problems can greatly influence a person, a person is created in the image of God and therefore is responsible for his or her own heart responses. Biblical counseling does not ignore the effect of one's nature or nurture, but rather sees a more important influence on behavior which comes out of the heart.<sup>3</sup> The Bible uses the term *heart* to describe a person's true self (Prov 23:7). The heart is the place where the "inner self thinks, feels, and decides."<sup>4</sup>

The heart is central to understanding the believer's continual struggle with sin and hope for transformation into Christlikeness. This life-long battle with sin and transformation into Christlikeness begins at conversion and continues throughout the believer's life. The Holy Spirit renews and transforms the heart, which produces new heart responses. This process of sanctification can be described as an already-not yet experience that begins at justification and ends in glorification. In this chapter I argue that the heart is the source of behavior, directs behavior, is renewed at conversion, and

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<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this project to address the effects of biological problems on behavior; this project focuses on non-organic spiritual problems. These problems come of the heart, which can also be described as the *inner man, soul, mind, or spirit*.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Lockyer, ed., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 466.

continues to be a battlefield where a war takes place and new fruit is produced.

### **Jesus Teaches that the Heart Is the Source of Behavior (Mark 7:14-23)**

One of the foundational truths of biblical counseling is the centrality of the heart as the source of human behavior. In Mark 7, the Pharisees and scribes were concerned about obedience to the law and traditions. This caused conflict with Jesus, since he challenged their understanding of obedience. Instead of focusing merely on external behavior, Jesus challenged his disciples to focus on the heart. Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah, saying, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Isa 29:13).

Jesus taught that people need to go beyond external behavior and focus on the heart, the source of human behavior. In Mark 7:14-23, Jesus taught about the true nature of man by focusing on the heart.

### **The Heart in Scripture**

The heart is a primary focus of biblical counseling. The word *heart* in Scripture can be used in three different ways: (1) literally (organ of the body), (2) emotionally (feelings), or (3) figuratively (literary device).<sup>5</sup> The Gospel of Mark uses the heart figuratively, reflecting the inner life of a person. The heart is the place where thoughts, motives, and desires come alive; these are then revealed in words, actions, and emotions.

The noun *καρδία* (“heart”) is a figurative term used to describe the inner nature of man. The heart is the “causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various

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<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 415, Logos Bible Software.

aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts—heart, inner self, mind.”<sup>6</sup> It is important to make the distinction between the biblical idea of the heart and the emotive idea found in culture.<sup>7</sup> According to Louw and Nida, the distinction is that “in English the term ‘heart’ focuses primarily upon the emotive aspects of life, in the Greek New Testament the emphasis is more upon the result of thought, particularly in view of the relationship of *καρδία* to the Hebrew term *leb*, which, though literally meaning ‘heart,’ refers primarily to the mind.”<sup>8</sup>

The heart functions in various ways in Scripture. Jeremy Pierre says that the heart has three functions: “Thinking, feeling, and choosing are complex dynamic heart responses.”<sup>9</sup> Another way to state these categories are cognition, affection, and volition.<sup>10</sup> These are not three independent functions of the heart, but they overlap and are interrelated. The heart therefore represents that following, as Pierre notes, “People are

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<sup>6</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 320, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>7</sup> Other helpful definitions of the heart include the following: “as center and source of the whole inner life, w. its thinking, feeling, and volition.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 508, Logos Bible Software. Wessel explains, “In Semitic expression the heart is the center of human personality that determine man’s actions and inactions (Isa 29:13).” Walter W. Wessel, *Mark*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 680. R. T. France notes, “Heart is the term most commonly used in Biblical literature for the essential personality.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 277.

<sup>8</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 320.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre describes the heart in more detail, stating, “The use of Kardia can be divided into at least four lexical categories: first, the heart is where feelings and emotions, desires and passions reside (affection). Second, the heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection (cognition). Third, the heart is the seat of the will, the source of resolves (volition). And fourth, the heart is supremely the one center in man to which God turns and from which man turns to God by faith (relationality).” Jeremy Paul Pierre, “Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart: The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 35.

thinking beings, desiring beings, and choosing beings simultaneously.”<sup>11</sup> It is a unified term to describe the inner life of man, which Jesus used to talk about the source of human behavior.

### **The Focus on the External**

It is easy to focus on what is external because that is what is seen in what people say or do. The law says what one is to do (or not do) and one either obeys or disobeys. The Pharisees and scribes were known for keeping the law, but they also added man-made traditions as additional requirements. In Mark 7, The Pharisees and scribes were together in Jerusalem when they noticed that Jesus’ disciples ate with unwashed hands. Purity was very important for the Jewish people as seen in the Old Testament law.

The Old Testament laws taught that a person could become unclean by eating certain animals and even touching certain animals (Lev 11). The Pharisees and scribes went beyond the Word of God by adding a requirement to wash their hands before eating, which was not part of the law (Mark 7:3). They were upset that the disciples were not obeying their tradition (Mark 7:5). Jesus responded to them by quoting from Isaiah 29:13; they honored God with their lips (external), but their heart was far from God (internal). Jesus concluded that they “leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8).

According to Jesus, the real problem was not the commandment of God or eating with unwashed hands, but rather the heart. Jesus understood the Old Testament law and used their understanding to teach a deeper understanding of humanity. The issue of purity and defilement for the Jews was very important. According to R. T. France, the law “served to mark out the Jews as the distinctive people of God, and to separate them

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre, *Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 18.



socially from other people.”<sup>12</sup>

Jesus began with their understanding of food and challenged their view of defilement (purity). He said that nothing outside the person that goes into him can defile him, rather it is what comes out of a person (Mark 7:14). The meaning of *defilement* is important. Lockyer explains that there are various ways the word *κοινῶσαι* (“to defile”) can be used:

To make unclean or impure. At least five types of defilement are mentioned in the Old Testament: (1) ceremonial (Lev 15:19); (2) ethical (Ezek 37:23); (3) physical (Song 5:3); (4) religious (Jer 3:1); and (5) sexual (Lev 15:24). The purpose of the Old Testament laws about defilement was to preserve the holiness of God’s chosen people. But the Jewish rabbis turned these laws into a legalistic system that emphasized ceremonial cleanliness while ignoring spiritual purity. Jesus reversed this situation by emphasizing the need for moral purity and ethical living (Mark 7:1–23).<sup>13</sup>

The Pharisees and scribes were dishonoring God by turning the Law into a system by which they judged others. This indictment was that their traditions led to vain worship. Jesus’ words and actions revealed that inner purity was more important than trying to attain purity by obedience to the Law.

Jesus had many interactions with people that would have defiled him. Jesus interacted with a defiled leper (Mark 1:41), a corpse (Mark 5:41), and a bleeding woman (Mark 5:27-29). All those actions would have made Jesus defiled according to the Old Testament, but Jesus taught that what truly defiled a person came from within. Robert Stein says, “What Jesus’ audience probably understood by these words was the importance of inner purity stemming from the heart. This was far more important than any outer ceremonial purity.”<sup>14</sup> The original audience had a context of ceremonial purity that was common in their day, which focused on outward actions. Jesus did not deny the

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<sup>12</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 277.

<sup>13</sup> Lockyer, *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 293.

<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 344.

ceremonial laws, but rather raised the standards on how they viewed being clean.

Jesus teaches that what matters most is not external actions (ceremonial cleanness), but the motive behind the actions. One can look outwardly pure (clean hands and food) but inwardly they are polluted.<sup>15</sup> This inward corruption is Jesus' focus, because the heart is the source of behavior.

### **The Focus on the Internal**

Jesus called the people together and told them that there was nothing outside a person that could defile him, but what comes out of a person defiles him (Mark 7:16). Jesus did not expand his teaching in public, but instead entered a home with his disciples. The disciples did not understand how this could be true, so he explained how defilement comes from within. Jesus explained that the reason food cannot defile a person is that the stomach and heart are not connected. Food enters the *κοινῶσαι* (“stomach”), goes through the digestive tract, and then is *ἀφεδρῶνα* (“eliminated from the body”). In other words, food enters the physical part of man but not his spiritual, the heart. As an application of this teaching, Jesus declared that all food is clean (Mark 7:19).

Jesus took a concept of defilement that the disciples understood and helped them focus internally on the heart. Jesus clarified for his disciples that what enters a man cannot defile him, since the heart is not affected by what one eats. Instead, Jesus changed the conversation to focus on the source of behavior. The shift in thinking helped the disciples to see beyond external appearances and actions, and to instead focus on the internal.

In Mark 7, Jesus teaches that the heart is the source of behavior. His emphasis begins with how one thinks (cognition) but contains other aspects of the heart (affections

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<sup>15</sup> Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and scribes in Matt 23:25-26: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.”

and choices). He says that out of the heart come οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ (“evil thoughts”). The New Testament uses διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ primarily in a negative sense.<sup>16</sup> This phrase could serve as an overarching category for the actions and dispositions in the list of things that come out of the heart.<sup>17</sup> Evil thoughts can be thought of as “sinful attitudes or disposition.”<sup>18</sup> Soon after creation the heart of man was described as producing evil continually (Gen 6:5), and the prophet Jeremiah described the heart of man as deceitful and wicked (Jer 17:9). Jesus told the Pharisees that they were thinking evil in their hearts (Matt 9:4).

Jesus said that out of the heart comes evil thoughts and then explained how that is revealed in behavior. This list of twelve vices (six plurals, six singular) are not an exhaustive list, but includes a wide range of behavior (Rom 1:29-31; 1 Cor 5:10-11; Gal 5:19-21; Col 3:5-8; 1 Tim 1:9-12; and 2 Tim 3:25). The first six can be described as sinful actions, while the other six can be classified as sinful dispositions.

The first in the list is πορνεῖαι (“sexual immorality”) and can be defined as follows, according to Louw and Nida: “to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution—to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality, fornication, prostitution.”<sup>19</sup> The desire to commit sexual immorality is due to the condition of the heart, not something that is external. One who commits an act of sexual immorality has already decided do so in his or her heart. This makes the one

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<sup>16</sup> Gottlob Schrenk comments, “In view of the more flexible LXX usage, it is striking that the NT uses διαλογισμός only in the negative sense for evil thoughts or anxious reflection. This shows how strong is the conviction that the sinful nature of man extends to his thinking and indeed to his very heart. Gottlob Schrenk, “Διαλέγομαι, Διαλογίζομαι, Διαλογισμός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 97.

<sup>17</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 346.

<sup>18</sup> Wessel, *Mark*, 681.

<sup>19</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 770.

responsible for his actions; he cannot blame his behavior on another.

The list of actions and dispositions is not an exhaustive list, but rather serve the purpose of showing different expressions of what comes out of the heart. Theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness are all expressions that find their source in the heart.

In verse 23, Jesus concludes that all these “evil things come from within” and that is what defiles a person. Jesus ends this section without explaining the remedy, but instead he emphasizes that man’s problem stems from within his heart. The heart in its unredeemed state is continually evil. Since life is lived out of the heart, behavior reveals the condition of a person’s heart. Commentator R. C. H. Lenski summarizes the condition of the heart, saying, “Jesus reveals what a cesspool the human heart is.”<sup>20</sup>

This section in Mark 7 helps biblical counselors focus on the heart and not merely on behavior. The external behavior is an expression of the condition of the heart. Since the heart of the person is the source of behavior, genuine change will occur when the heart is addressed. The biblical counselor can go beyond symptoms to deal with the root issues that come out of the heart. This helps counselees see that they are responsible for their actions, and that change must occur in the heart.

### **James Teaches that the Heart Directs Behavior (Jas 4:1-4)**

The interaction between the heart and behavior can be seen in a multi-dimensional way, as the heart is the place of thinking, desiring, and choosing. The human heart is always active and human behavior is complex. Biblical counselors must go beneath the surface of human behavior to understand what is motivating a person to act a particular way.<sup>21</sup> The motivation may be wrong thoughts, wrong desires, or wrong

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<sup>20</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 300, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>21</sup> This is made clear in Heb 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any

choices.

The Bible provides an illustration in the book of James of wrong desires that led to wrong behavior. James' understanding of the heart relates to Jesus' earlier teaching in Mark 7:21-22, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness." James applies Jesus' teaching to conflict in the church, revealing how the desires of the heart direct behavior. James shows how the source of behavior begins in the heart before it is expressed externally in the context of relationships. This passage gives an example of conflict in the church and reveals how different desires can rule the heart.

### **Conflict in the Church**

It is common in conflict for one person to blame the other person for his or her actions. One person says to another, "You make me so angry!" Instead of pointing the finger at the other person, James calls people to focus back on their own hearts.<sup>22</sup> James asks questions to help his readers think deeper than surface level behavior: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" (Jas 4:1). He uses terms that express a hostile situation, "fights and quarrels." The term *πόλεμοι* ("quarrels") has the idea of armed military conflict, including wars, battles, or fights.<sup>23</sup> The second word *μάχαι* ("fights") has the idea of fighting, quarrels, disputes, or strife.<sup>24</sup> The word *πόλεμοι* refers to outward physical contact, while *μάχαι* refers to non-physical behavior, such as angry

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two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

<sup>22</sup> Jesus also called people to focus on their own hearts: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Matt 7:1-2).

<sup>23</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 844.

<sup>24</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 622.

words. James uses these two words to show the inclusive nature of conflict.

James does not specify the details of the conflict, instead he explains the root cause of conflict.<sup>25</sup> Douglas Moo suggests, “The fact that James does not comment directly on the issues involved suggests that his concern was more with the selfish spirit and bitterness of the quarrels than with the rights and wrongs of the various viewpoints.”<sup>26</sup> James’ focus on the heart gives insight on how the desires of the heart direct behavior.

### **The Desires of the Heart**

James makes the case that the root cause of conflict is the desire of the heart. He asks, “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (Jas 4:1). The word passions is *δονῶν*,<sup>27</sup> and is found in verse 1 and at the end of verse 3. This word expresses the self-orientation of the heart. The word *ἡδονῶν* is translated as the “state or condition of experiencing pleasure for any reason, pleasure, delight, enjoyment, pleasantness.”<sup>28</sup> The word hedonism comes from this word. J. Ronald Blue contends, “Hedonism, the playboy philosophy that makes pleasure mankind’s chief end, still wages battles in people’s hearts.”<sup>29</sup> It is usually used in a negative sense for one’s evil pleasure or illicit

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<sup>25</sup> George Stulac observes, “James does not specify examples of the desires. What he does say could refer to conflict in group relationships, such as within a church: inflexibility about issues (from a desire to have one’s own way), maneuvering for position of authority (from a desire for status and admiration within the community) or criticizing others (from a desire to make oneself look good). It is equally applicable in individual relationships, such as a marital conflict: constantly exchanging hurtful words (from a desire to get even) or carrying out sexual infidelity (from a desire for selfish pleasure or simply a desire for another spouse). All of these happen in Christian churches and Christian marriages; they are all immoral.” George M. Stulac, *James*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 139-40.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 181.

<sup>27</sup> This term is only used 4 times in the New Testament: Luke 8:14, Titus 3:3, and 2 Pet 2:13.

<sup>28</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 434.

<sup>29</sup> J. Ronald Blue, *James*, in vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the*

desire. The same word is used for passions in 1 Peter 2:11: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” James explains that these passions or desires that are waging war in the heart are bent toward self-indulgent pleasure. The desire for pleasure is not necessarily sin, rather it is when desire has become inordinate and disordered. James says earlier, “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” (Jas 1:14-15). Desire when conceived becomes sin, which may lead to death. In the next two verses James shows how unmet desires lead to conflict. The desires in this context are negative, since they are selfish in nature. This is expressed as envy and coveting, which Jesus earlier described as coming out of the heart (Matt 7:21-22).

**Envious desires.** James shows how envious desires of the heart lead to serious conflict. He uses the common word for desire *ἐπιθυμία*, which means “to have the affections directed toward something, to lust, desire, long after.”<sup>30</sup> This desire can be used in a good sense (Luke 22:15) or a bad sense (Matt 5:28). In this context, the desires are selfish and disordered, which is expressed when desires are unfulfilled and frustrated.

James does not state what the object of the desire is, but rather what happens when the desire becomes frustrated. He teaches that when people desire but do not receive what they want, they murder. The conflict begins in the heart when a person believes that he or she must have something at all costs. The object of the desire rules the heart, and it becomes a disordered desire. When the desire becomes frustrated by one not receiving what is wanted, it leads to murder. This could be taken as an actual occurrence or figuratively. This reveals the self-orientation of the heart; the desire for one’s own

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*Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 829.

<sup>30</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1992), 627.

pleasure leads one to murder.

**Covetous desires.** In the next verse, James reveals covetous desires in the heart. James says in verse 2, “You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” Coveting describes a desire to have what another person has. Kurt Richardson explains, “Coveting is another dimension of the conflicts here. Whereas envy is willing to destroy in order to gain what belongs to another, coveting is willing to steal what is not one’s own. Coveting is willingness to turn an earthly object of human desire into something of ultimate concern. This idolatry becomes a particularly heinous sin in its fixation upon the property or relationship that belongs to another.”<sup>31</sup>

When the desire for what another person has is not met, it leads to fighting and quarrelling. This answers James’ first question of what causes fights and quarrels. They are not caused by others, but rather they are caused by the desires of the heart. Covetous desires can rule the heart and direct one’s behavior.

**Selfish desires.** The desires of the heart can be seen in one’s approach to prayer. James explains that selfish desires can be revealed in one’s prayer life. Jesus told his followers that they are to ask God for things in prayer, saying, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24). James uses an example of prayer to expose selfish desires. He argues, “You ask, and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (Jas 4:3).

James uses the same word *passions* that is found in verse 1. Those who have selfish desires for their own pleasures will not receive what they ask for from the Lord. This is so serious that James calls them “adulterous people!” They have forsaken God and become friends of the world. James says that whoever is a friend of the world is at

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<sup>31</sup> Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, New American Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 176, Logos Bible Software.



enmity with God.

James' teaching is a sobering warning for believers. Believers may find themselves in conflict, often justifying their attitudes and actions. James calls believers to examine their hearts and ask themselves why they quarrel and fight amongst themselves. James answers this question clearly and boldly; it is due to selfish desires in the heart. These desires for pleasure lead people to act in ungodly and harmful ways.

James teaches that the desires of the heart direct people's lives. He uses a common experience of conflict to expose the heart. These desires can express themselves as envious, covetous, or selfish. This is helpful for biblical counselors to get beneath the surface of behavior. The knowledge that desire drives behaviors challenges biblical counselors to consider what the counselee wants. These desires may not be inherently evil, but they become evil when they are selfish, inordinate, and disordered. Selfish desires are expressed in a desire for one's own pleasure. Inordinate desires want something too much. Disordered desires want something that is wrong.

Biblical counselors need to become skilled at helping make counselees aware of their own heart, for according to Proverbs 20:5, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." This does not lead to despair, but rather points the counselee back to Jesus and the hope of a renewed heart that the gospel offers.<sup>32</sup> There is hope for transformation since Jesus came not just to save people from their sins, but also to transform their hearts. This process of renewal is a life-long process that begins at conversion and ends in glory.

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<sup>32</sup> James promises believers that they can find grace if they submit their desires to God. He says, "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (Jas 4:6-10).

## **Paul Teaches on the Hope of a New Heart (2 Cor 5:11-21)**

Many forms of counseling focus on behavioral modification without addressing the root issues in the heart. Biblical counseling brings true hope to believers because it focuses on heart renewal that produces long-term change. Biblical counseling provides a framework for human behavior, along with hope for how a person can change. The hope for changing is not found within a person's own ability but is found "in Christ."<sup>33</sup> The apostle Paul describes the one who is in Christ as a "new creation" (1 Cor 5:17), whose old life has passed away and a new life of transformation has begun. This process of transformation continues throughout the believer's life and is fully completed in heaven.

The apostle Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 the hope of a new heart that comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. As a believer is united with Christ, there is a new reality, a new creation, a new relationship, and a new righteousness.

### **A New Reality**

The gospel changed Paul's entire outlook on life. He went from being a persecutor of the church to its foremost proclaimer. The truth that most affected Paul was that Jesus died and rose again. This new reality in Paul's life affected everything about him. He says that he was so affected by the "love of Christ" that it "controls" him (2 Cor 5:14). The verb *συνέχω* is translated as control and has the idea of "to hold within bounds so as to manage or guide, direct, control," according to Bauer.<sup>34</sup> Paul states that he was controlled by the love of Christ, which affected his thoughts, affections, and actions. This new reality, the death and resurrection of Jesus, became the basis for understanding the

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<sup>33</sup> George Guthrie says, "To be 'in Christ,' a phrase used 76 times in Paul, has been understood variously: it should probably be interpreted as a dative of association, 'in relation to Christ.'" George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 307.

<sup>34</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 971.

love of Christ.

The love of Christ referred to by Paul was the truth that Christ had died for all, and therefore all have died (1 Cor 5:14). Jesus' death is crucial to understanding that a believer has hope for changing. Those who are in Christ are united with Jesus in his death (Rom 6:5). The old self is crucified so that the believer is set free from sin (Rom 6:6-7; Gal 2:20). Jesus' death brings about death to sin, so that the believer united with Christ can put sin to death and live to God (Rom 6:11). The power of sin is broken, and the believer is set free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).

Paul speaks about the purpose of Jesus' death, that he would be transformed so that he no longer lived for self but for God (1 Cor 5:15). This transformation comes as the believer dies to self and lives for Christ. David Garland states, "Christ's death must change the way we live here and now on earth, not simply ensure our entrance into God's eternal presence."<sup>35</sup> The new reality is that death with Christ becomes the ground for living for Christ (Gal 2:20; Col 3:1-13). The transformation process is rooted in one's new identity of being "in Christ."

This new reality for Paul was that Jesus' death and resurrection affected how he lived. He was now motivated by the love of Christ that was expressed in Christ's death. Jesus' death and resurrection provides believers with hope not just for forgiveness of sins, but for transformation of their hearts. The believer is transformed from selfishness to serving Christ.

### **A New Creation**

Jesus' death produces a change in man that is described as a "new creation." This phrase *new creation* is commonly used to describe the physical creation and God's promise to renew it (Isa 65:17; Rom 8:19-21). Paul used it to describe those who are born

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<sup>35</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 280, Logos Bible Software.

again (see Rom 12:2; Gal 6:14; Eph 2:10, 4:23; Titus 3:5). James Scott brings these ideas together, stating, “Paul calls believers a new creation because they, with the rest of creation undergo a physical and spiritual transformation, which is an act of creation on a personal level.”<sup>36</sup> The new creation is equivalent to the new birth or conversion, and is dependent on being “in Christ.” Paul emphasized the believer’s new identity, which is characterized by old things passing away and new things coming.

Paul says that the old has “passed away.” The verb *παρῆλθεν* is in the aorist tense and denotes a point in time in the past. One area of change is found in Paul’s attitude toward people and Christ (1 Cor 5:16). Paul no longer saw people according to the flesh, but instead saw them in the image of God. Furthermore, Paul describes that the old life has passed away, which means there is a radical break from the old self. This old life is characterized in Adam, one that is according to the flesh. Murray Harris says, “It refers to the whole set of conditions and relationships that marked believers in their unregenerate state when they behaved *κατὰ σάρκα*, that is, they were governed in thought and action by the desires of the *σάρξ* (Rom. 8:2; Eph. 2:3) and so were under the dominion of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).”<sup>37</sup> This description is helpful because it speaks about a complete change in the person. The reality is that the one in Adam did not need moral change or minor improvement, but a total restructure of the heart. The life characterized in Adam is characterized as “among whom we all once lived in the passions

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<sup>36</sup> James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 136. Another helpful illustration of the new creation includes the following from Barrett: “Christian existence means that by faith one lives in the midst of the old creation in terms of the new creation that God has brought about through Jesus.” Charles K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 175. Furthermore, Lenski notes, “What would a new creation have to do with these good-for-nothing old things of the old life? . . . And ‘passed away’ is correct despite the fact that some of the old things still cling to us in this life. They only cling to the new creation; they are now ‘old things’ and not really any longer a part of us.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 1040, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>37</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 433.

of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph 2:3).” Ultimately life in Adam leads to physical and spiritual death and only the grace of God can bring about a change.

Paul says that the new has come. The verb *γέγονεν* (“to become”) is in the perfect tense, representing something that has continual effect. In other words, the new creation has come and is here to stay. One could say that the old continues to become new. This new life is found “in Christ” and is characterized by a new heart. The new life is in process of ongoing renewal (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Although the power of sin is broken, the presence of sin remains and affects a believer. Therefore, the heart is in process of being renewed.<sup>38</sup>

The work of the new creation cannot be undone and what God has begun, he will complete (Phil 1:6). There is hope for transformation because this new creation is in process of changing and the past is no longer the reality. The law of sin and death has been done away with, and new life has come in one’s identity as a new creation.

### **A New Relationship**

The gospel brings about a new relationship for the believer. In Adam, man is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and is an enemy of God (Rom 5:10). Through Christ God reconciles man back to himself, not counting trespasses against him (2 Cor 5:19). The result is that enmity and hostility are put away and a new relationship of peace exists between God and man (Rom 5:1).

A new relationship with God now allows man to be honest with his sin,

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<sup>38</sup> Some in evangelicalism overemphasize the condition of the new heart in regeneration. Charles Leiter argues, “The Christian has been given a new heart. He has become ‘pure in heart,’ an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.’ Such statements cannot be made about those whose hearts are ‘more deceitful than all else and desperately sick’! Lest any should suppose that the believer has *both* and old heart and a new heart, God specifically says, ‘I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.’” Charles Leiter, *Justification and Regeneration* (Hannibal, MO: Granted Ministries Press, 2009), 64. The Bible says believers are being transformed (2 Cor 3:18), and renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16).

without fear of judgement or shame. This new relationship spurs him on in sanctification. It is because man is reconciled to God that the work of sanctification can begin.

### **A New Righteousness**

The last section reveals one other aspect of the new identity. There is a divine exchange on the cross. On the cross Jesus is treated as a sinner, standing in the place of mankind. Jesus receives the full weight of the penalty and punishment for man's sin, while remaining sinless (Heb 4:15, 7:16; 1 Pet 2:22, 3:18; 1 John 3:5). Jesus was cursed so that man would not be (Gal 3:13).

This new righteousness in Christ provides hope for the believer since the believer receives a new identity. The believer is positionally righteous and begins to live out practical righteousness. Transformation is possible because believers are sanctified and continue to be sanctified (1 Cor 1:30). The righteousness of Christ is a promise that the believer will be changed.

Biblical counselors can give hope to counselees because the result of the new creation is a new heart that is being renewed and transformed daily (2 Cor 4:16). The fact that Christlikeness is grounded in the reality of being "in Christ" points counselees to dependence on Jesus, not their own strength. This hope is found in the believer having a new reality, becoming a new creation, having a new relationship with God, and receiving a new righteousness. Since these are all acts of God's initiative and power, they provide the basis for transformation into Christlikeness. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

### **Paul Teaches About the War in the Redeemed Heart (Gal 5:16-25)**

One of the realities that biblical counseling must address is the struggle with

sin in the believer's heart. Scripture teaches that man has received a new heart at conversion, yet there is a continual battle with sin. This experience can be described as already-not yet; the believer is already sanctified in Christ (the power of sin has been dealt with), but not yet free from the presence of sin (final glorification). This experience in the middle can be described as a war in the redeemed heart. Although the believer is a new creation, this new creation does not remove the presence of the flesh.<sup>39</sup> The new creation now guarantees a struggle because there are two opposing realities, the flesh versus the indwelling Spirit.

This already-not yet experience guards against different extremes. Some may look at their life and feel shame for struggling with sin and may conclude that they are not a believer. Another extreme is for believers to become so introspective that they only focus on their behavior, instead of the righteousness that comes from the finished work of Jesus. Since the work of sanctification is an already-not yet experience, believers have been sanctified (1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:10) but must wait until they are fully sanctified (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2). This period in between is experienced through a battle in the heart, where sin is exposed, and the Spirit works to transform the believer.

In Galatians 5:16-25 the apostle Paul teaches the reality of the ongoing war in the redeemed heart. The reality is the war of indwelling sin and the indwelling Spirit. In this text Paul describes the primary agent and source of change, the ensuing conflict inside, the works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit, and concludes with a final

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<sup>39</sup> The flesh is referred to as “the psychological aspect of human nature which contrasts with the spiritual nature; in other words, that aspect of human nature which is characterized by or reflects typical human reasoning and desires in contrast with those aspects of human thought and behavior which relate to God and the spiritual life.” Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 321. This is the reality for the believer: “Believers have crucified the *sárx* (Rom. 7:5; 8:8–9; Gal. 5:24). They do not escape corporeality by asceticism etc. (cf. Gal. 2:19–20). They enter a life that in Christ is determined by the relation to God (Gal 2:20). Works of the flesh are illogical and call for recommitment. Life is not split up into single acts. It is one *érgon* under one determination, *sárx* or *pneúma*. Believers are no longer building on the *sárx* but on Christ. This is what they are to achieve in the daily practice of the life of faith.” Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1005.

exhortation of how to live in this tension.

### **The Primary Agent and Source of Change**

Paul emphasizes the role of the Spirit as the agent and source of change in a believer's life. The Spirit was given to believers at conversion (Eph 1:13-14) and is called the helper (John 14:14-17).

Paul uses four phrases in this section to emphasize how the Spirit is the agent and source of change: (1) "walk by the Spirit" (5:16), (2) "led by the Spirit" (5:18), (3) "live by the Spirit" (5:25), and 4) "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25). The first two introduce the section, while the last two conclude it.

In verse 16, Paul commands believers to "walk by the Spirit." The command comes with a promise that Christians "will not gratify the desires of the flesh." The command περιπατεῖτε ("to walk") means "to conduct one's life, comport oneself, behave, live."<sup>40</sup> The idea of walk is equivalent to "a way of life." The Greek construction places the πνεύματι ("Spirit") before the verb περιπατεῖτε ("to walk"), which emphasizes the work of the Spirit. Richard Longenecker says, "The dative πνεύματι suggests both origin and instrumentality ("by the Spirit") and therefore a quality of life that differs from both a nomistic and a libertine lifestyle."<sup>41</sup> This point is important because the focus is placed back on the Spirit as the agent and the power to live out this new life in Christ.

Paul reminds the Galatians of the reality of the Spirit since the Judaizers taught false doctrine, primarily placing believers back under the bondage of the Law. Paul rebuked the believers in Galatia for believing false teaching, saying, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3). Paul rebukes the believers for thinking that they could live in their flesh without dependence

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<sup>40</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 803.

<sup>41</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 244.



on the Spirit. They did not receive the Spirit by obeying the Law, but by faith. The Spirit was sent into the hearts of believers (Gal 4:6), and therefore they cannot go back to the law to find their hope. Paul's initial call to believers is to "walk by the Spirit."

The reality Paul teaches is that there are two realms in which a believer can walk, either according to the Spirit or the flesh (Rom 8:4). The new reality is that a believer can live by the Spirit, and thereby put to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). Thomas Schreiner observes a tension, which I believe is true: "On the one hand, believers must choose to live by the Spirit, while on the other hand, the Spirit empowers believers to live a life pleasing to God."<sup>42</sup>

### **The Ensuing Conflict Inside**

Paul explains why a believer is called to walk by the Spirit. There is a reality in the heart of every believer, a reality that did not exist before conversion. At conversion, the believer receives the Spirit (Gal 4:6) and the Spirit comes into direct conflict with the flesh in man (Gal 5:17).

Paul explains that "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit" and "the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh." Schreiner says, "A great battle wages in the hearts of believers."<sup>43</sup> Paul continues to explain this great opposition, the desires of the flesh being opposed to the desires of the Spirit. The old desires of the flesh remain, but there are new desires from the Spirit for righteousness. The reality of indwelling sin and the indwelling Spirit reveal a war in the heart. The reality is that the believer does not need to give into the desires of the flesh, but due to the remaining flesh there is potential to give in to those desires.

The final clause ἵνα μὴ ἂ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε ("to keep you from doing the

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 244.

<sup>43</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 343.

things you want to do”) has been interpreted in different ways. Moo explains that the conjunction is important: “The conjunction ἵνα usually indicates purpose, ‘in order that,’ but it can sometimes denote result, or consequence (‘with the result that’).”<sup>44</sup> This means that the verse could indicate (1) the believer cannot do what the Spirit impels them to; (2) the flesh is unable to fulfill its desires; (3) neither the Spirit or flesh fulfill its desires; (4) believers cannot remain neutral in the struggle of the flesh and Spirit; or, (5) the conflict ensues with a new eschatological reality that the flesh can be overcome by the Spirit.<sup>45</sup> The first three views can be rejected based on other Scripture texts, but the last two views have validity. Moo makes the point that believers are now “in Christ” and therefore have a new relationship with the flesh and sin, one that is controlled and led by the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> He says, “Christians should not think they have the choice to do ‘whatever they want’; whether conscious of it or not, their actions at every point are governed by either the flesh or the Spirit.”<sup>47</sup> Moo presents the dualism that is seen in Scripture (flesh/Spirit, sin/righteousness) and believers live within these realms. The actions that come out of the heart are either governed by the flesh or the Spirit.

Therefore, Paul uses different phrases to emphasize dependence on the Spirit. Paul called believers to be “led by the Spirit” (Gal 5:18), which has similarities to the command to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). The word ἄγεσθε (“you are led”) is a present passive verb. It means to “be led, allow oneself to be led.”<sup>48</sup> It does not mean that one is not active, rather that the believer is allowing himself to come under the direct influence

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 355.

<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 344.

<sup>46</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 356.

<sup>47</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 356.

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 16.

of the Spirit. Ronald Fung argues, “The active leading of the Holy Spirit does not signify the believer’s being, so to speak, led by the nose willy-nilly; on the contrary, he must let himself be led by the Spirit—that is, actively choose to stand on the side of the Spirit over against the flesh.”<sup>49</sup> This Spirit dependence leads to obedience.

The reality is that there is a conflict of the flesh and the Spirit in the heart of a believer. A believer can either submit to the indwelling Spirit or the indwelling flesh. The evidence of one’s submission is seen in the way the flesh and the Spirit express themselves.

### **The Works of the Flesh Versus the Fruit of the Spirit**

The flesh and the Spirit produce different results in the life of a believer. In Galatians 5:19-23, Paul lists fifteen expressions of the flesh and nine expressions of the Spirit. There is no order or grouping to these lists. The vice list (vv. 19-21) ends with “things like these,” which shows that this is not an exhaustive list, but a representative of the works of the flesh.

The vices listed are called the τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός (“works of the flesh”), referring to fallen mankind and the expression of that nature. The σαρκός (“flesh”) is a genitive of source, specifying that evil deeds stem from the old Adam.<sup>50</sup> The list contains sins that can fit any time or culture. Paul called the works of the flesh evident: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, and divisions.

Paul does highlight three sexual sins, which may indicate the rampant nature of sexual perversion in the Greco-Roman world. Fung summarizes the list, saying,

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 251.

<sup>50</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 346.

“However, they might be classified, all the deeds of the flesh are manifestations of a life dictated by ‘self’ instead of being led by the Spirit, in pursuit of one’s own ends rather than in fulfillment of God’s will.”<sup>51</sup> Paul adds a warning in verse 21 that those “who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The verb *πράσσοντες* (“practice”) represents a habitual lifestyle. Fung states that this “denotes not an occasional lapse but habitual behavior.”<sup>52</sup> Paul calls believers to live out the new reality in their lives and not to turn their liberty back into an opportunity for sin (Rom 6:1-2; Gal 5:13).

Paul also lists the *καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός* (“fruit of the Spirit”). While the works of the flesh come naturally out of man, the “fruit of the Spirit” comes forth supernaturally from the Spirit. Paul uses a singular term “fruit” which may emphasize that there is unity in the fruit, such as a diamond that has many facets. Paul lists nine expressions of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The focus is not on the believer working these out in his or her life, but rather on the Spirit producing the fruit. The fruit of the Spirit that is worked out in a believer’s life is a result of the internal work of the Spirit.<sup>53</sup>

The primary fruit of the Spirit is *ἀγάπη* (“love”). Love is a mark of the Spirit’s work in a believer and is the crowning virtue (1 Cor 13). Paul previously called on the Galatians to “serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13), which is a fulfillment of the Law (Gal 5:14). This love is not produced by the flesh but comes from God (1 John 4:7-13).

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<sup>51</sup> Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 261.

<sup>52</sup> Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 261.

<sup>53</sup> Allan Chapple makes this point when he says, “There is another way of making this quite fundamental point: the greatest breakthrough we experience as Christians is what happens at the very beginning, when we are given new birth, raised from death to new life, adopted into God’s family, and so on. As a result, progress in the Christian life is the process of becoming what we are already. That is because the decisive breakthrough is behind us, not ahead of us: ‘The old has gone, the new is here!’ In the New Testament, this means that Christian growth is not the quest for some gift or change or experience that we lack and must have. Instead, it is the progressive taking hold of, entering into, and expressing, what we are and have already as a result of God’s saving grace.” Allan Chapple, *True Devotion: In Search of Authentic Spirituality*, Latimer Briefings 17 (London: Latimer Trust, 2014), chap. 3, sec. 3.3.3., Kindle.

This list of nine virtues are all expressions of the Spirit's inward work of transformation in the life of the believer. They are contrary to the flesh and are supernaturally produced, in contrast to the works of the flesh which come naturally.

### **Final Exhortation**

Paul ends this section with a final exhortation based on the reality of the redeemed heart. Paul states in verse 24 that believers have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. Earlier, in Galatians 2:20, Paul speaks about the new reality of being in union with Christ; he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

There is a weakening of the flesh when a believer is brought into union with Christ. Moo helpfully explains, "The crucifixion of the flesh does not mean that it is totally destroyed but that it is definitely judged and its power decisively broken."<sup>54</sup> This is important because in the already-not yet experience of sanctification, the believer is not fighting *for* victory, but *from* victory. Believers have hope of change because they have new hearts. The flesh has been weakened and the Spirit lives inside them.

Paul refers to this reality in verse 25 when he says, "if we live by the Spirit." The first-class conditional clause can be translated "since we have the Spirit." Since a believer has the Spirit, the believer's new life is no longer dominated by the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh still remain (indwelling sin), but believers have a new reality (indwelling Spirit). This reality encourages the believer to fight the battle against sin, as Paul gives the imperative "keep in step with the Spirit." The verb *στοιχῶμεν* ("keep in step") has the idea of "stand in a row, to be in line with, or agree with."<sup>55</sup> This

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<sup>54</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 368.

<sup>55</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 265.

means that believers are to pursue the Spirit's enabling power to express these virtues in their life. The command to keep in step with the Spirit is rooted in the reality of union with Christ, with the reality that the passions and desires of the flesh have been crucified.<sup>56</sup> Another way of saying this is that the imperative is rooted in the indicative, doctrine leads to practice.

The truth that there is a battle in the redeemed heart helps biblical counselors understand their counselees, and their own hearts. Since a believer is a new creation in Christ, there are new realities that must be believed to battle with remaining sin. The truth is that the flesh has been crucified and the Spirit lives inside each believer. When a believer submits to the Spirit (walking, led by, keeping in step), the promise is that he or she will not gratify the desires of the flesh. The promise is that the indwelling Spirit is greater and more powerful than indwelling sin, and at the same time there is a conflict moment by moment in the heart of a believer.

### **Conclusion**

The heart is central for understanding a believer's continual struggle with sin and hope for transformation into Christlikeness. Jesus taught that the heart is the source of behavior (Mark 7:14-23), James taught that the heart directs behavior (Jas 4:1-4), Paul taught the hope of a new heart (1 Cor 5:11-21), and that there is a war in the redeemed heart (Gal 5:16-25). Biblical counseling focus on the centrality of the heart because genuine change occurs in the heart, when the Spirit renews and transforms thoughts, desires, and choices. Sanctification is an already-not yet experience that is rooted in the reality of Jesus' death, which grants a believer a new heart. There continues to be a war

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<sup>56</sup> Schreiner says it like this: "The death of the flesh does not mean that believers do not feel the tug of fleshly desires (5:17). Still, the flesh has been dealt a decisive blow at the cross. The passions and desires of the flesh are not absent, but they no longer rule and reign. Those who walk by the Spirit and who are led by the Spirit find themselves, even though imperfectly and partially, triumphing over the passion of the flesh that formerly dominated them." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 351.

in the redeemed heart, indwelling sin against the indwelling Spirit. The promise is that the flesh has lost its power, and the Spirit will work to renew the heart and produce new fruit in the life of the believer. Biblical counseling embraces the biblical tension, giving hope to counselees that transformation into Christlikeness is possible.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE PRIORITY OF ADDRESSING THE HEART IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The priority of addressing the heart makes biblical counseling unique compared to other systems of counseling. Biblical counseling aims at the heart as the place where change occurs, the Spirit renews and transforms thoughts, desires, and choices. Biblical counselors use the authoritative and sufficient Scriptures to help counselees become more aware of their heart responses.

Biblical counseling prioritizes an understanding of the heart since the heart is the source of thoughts, intentions, desires, motives, actions, and emotions. The primary goal of biblical counseling is not behavior modification, but Christlikeness through heart change. Redemptive solutions renew the heart which is expressed in a change of thinking (Rom 12:1), desires (Gal 5:16), and new ways of living (Eph 5:1-2). The heart is complex and dynamic, and only the Word of God can diagnose and provide hope for change. The author of Hebrews says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). The Word of God and the Spirit are the primary means that change the heart. Biblical counselors help counselees become aware of their heart responses and direct them to faith in Christ.

Biblical counseling is a distinct form of counseling that focuses on the heart. Biblical counselors have the Scripture, the body of Christ, and the gospel to aim at heart renewal in men and women. This chapter argues that the priority of biblical counseling is to address the heart in light of the Scripture, community, and the gospel.



## **The Priority of the Sufficiency of Scripture**

The priority of the sufficiency of Scripture to counseling is an important emphasis of biblical counseling. The Scriptures are the only sure foundation to help men and women understand their problems, motives, and find redemptive solutions in Christ. Biblical counseling points people to the hope in God, faith in Christ, and the Word of God that speaks to all the issues of life.<sup>1</sup> Scripture brings clarity and hope to the difficulties of life, opening the eyes of the blind and transforming the heart. The Scriptures provide eternal hope that changes one's perspectives on the present trials of life. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture for biblical counseling, and how the doctrine of sufficiency provides an understanding of the heart.

### **Sufficiency of Scripture and Biblical Counseling**

The sufficiency of Scripture is a doctrine that is the foundation for all of life and ministry. How one understands the Scriptures will impact and influence his or her counseling. The doctrine of sufficiency is built on the truth that the Scriptures are inspired, inerrant, and authoritative (1 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Therefore, this doctrine provides a framework for biblical counselors.<sup>2</sup> This framework includes an objective source of truth, application of the Bible in counseling, and the purposes and goals for counseling.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Mack further defines biblical counseling: "For counseling to be worthy of the name of Christ, the counselor must be conscientiously and comprehensively committed to the sufficiency of Scripture for understanding and resolving all of the non-physical personal and interpersonal sin-related difficulties of man." Wayne A. Mack, "The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 67.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Pierre clarifies the use of Scripture, saying, "Scripture is sufficient to convey the main concerns of God regarding the human experience, and these serve as the authoritative framework by which we interpret all information on that subject. To put it differently, Scripture is all we need to understand God's ultimate design of and purpose for human beings." Jeremy Pierre, "Scripture Is Sufficient, but to Do What?" in *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Robert W. Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 98.

The sufficiency of Scripture provides an objective source of truth to use in counseling. The sufficiency of Scripture is found in both the Old and New Testaments (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:2-7). The Scriptures are sufficient to teach one how to be saved (justification) and how to grow in the grace of Christ (progressive sanctification). There has been a contentious debate over how to understand sufficiency as it pertains to counseling. Wayne Mack explains, “There have always been people who have affirmed the inerrancy and authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice, but who would not affirm the sufficiency of Scripture for understanding and resolving the spiritual (non-physical) problems of man.”<sup>3</sup> This is important because it reveals that some believe in sufficiency, but have a different understanding of how this doctrine applies to the practical issues of life.<sup>4</sup> Biblical counseling prioritizes the sufficiency of Scripture to understand man and his problems, not just for salvation but for all areas of life. Ed Hindson speaks to the practical nature of Scripture when he says, “Scripture speaks to every area of personal and practical living; it is God’s blueprint for our lives. Yes, it tells us how to get to heaven, but it also tells us how to make the journey until we get there.”<sup>5</sup> If the Scriptures were not sufficient for addressing the spiritual problems of man, another source of authority would be used.<sup>6</sup> All counseling systems have a reference of authority

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” in *Totally Sufficient: The Bible and Christian Counseling*, ed. Edward E. Hindson and Howard Eyrich (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004), 26.

<sup>4</sup> John Frame gives a helpful definition of sufficiency: “Christians sometimes say that Scripture is sufficient for religion, or preaching, or theology, but not for auto repairs, plumbing, animal husbandry, dentistry, and so forth. And of course many argue that it is not sufficient for science, philosophy, or even ethics. This is to miss an important point. Certainly Scripture contains more specific information relevant to theology than dentistry. But sufficiency in the present context is not sufficiency of specific information but sufficiency of divine words. Scripture contains divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words that the plumber needs, and all the divine words that the theologian needs. So it is just as sufficient for plumbing as it is for theology. And in that sense it is sufficient for science and ethics as well.” John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 221.

<sup>5</sup> Howard Eyrich and Ed Hindson, “Total Sufficiency and Biblical Truth,” in Hindson and Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> Mack says that some suggest a two-book approach: “One approach they use is called the two-

and knowledge, which could be a theory or a written document. The most common example is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* that is used in psychiatry.<sup>7</sup> The *DSM-5* gives an understanding of people and their problems, but this source does not have the same level of authority as Scripture.<sup>8</sup> The *DSM-5* can provide helpful descriptions and categories, but often competes with a biblical view of understanding people, problems, and solutions.<sup>9</sup> The sufficiency of Scripture provides a framework for how the Bible is applied in biblical counseling. John Street connects the source of truth with counseling:

Biblical counseling fully acknowledges that its epistemology grows out of a theistic presupposition to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (2 Pet 1:3). The Bible is not an encyclopedia of counseling topics that lists every particular counseling problem, but it does contain sufficient revelatory data to establish an effective worldview framework for the diagnostic and remedy of every soul problem.<sup>10</sup>

This is very helpful because it helps define how the Bible is used in counseling, both to diagnose and to give hope. It also reveals that the Scriptures are

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book or the general versus special revelation approach. The argument that is often used to support this theory is that God reveals truth to us in two primary ways: through ‘non-propositional truth deposited by God in the created order of things’ which ‘must be investigated and discovered by mankind’ and through ‘the propositional truth recorded in Scripture.’ Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” 32.

<sup>7</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is ironic that *Scientific American* wrote an article describing the *DSM-5* as the “bible” of psychiatry. Ferris Jabr, “The Newest Edition of Psychiatry’s ‘Bible,’ the DSM-5, Is Complete,” *Scientific American*, January 28, 2013, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/dsm-5-update/?redirect=1>.

<sup>8</sup> An important question is how to use the observations made apart from the Bible. David Powlison provides a fair balance of the role of psychology in a model of counseling. He says, “It should play no role in our model of counseling. But, radically reinterpreted, secular observations could play an illustrational role, providing examples and details that illustrate the biblical model and fill out our knowledge. They could also play a provocative role, challenging us to develop in areas we may never have thought about or may have neglected.” David Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 30.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem says, “The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we are to add nothing to Scripture, and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.” Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 131).

<sup>10</sup> Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” 39.

sufficient, not exhaustive. In other words, the Bible provides a framework, not, as David Powlison calls it, an “encyclopedia or concordance mentality.”<sup>11</sup> The Bible does not describe every problem man may find himself in, but rather gives a biblical framework in how to think and address any problem that man struggles with.<sup>12</sup> The Bible connects doctrine and life, but this is often done through narrative stories, not specific instructions or commands. The challenge for the biblical counselor is to not only know the Bible, but to understand how to connect the Bible to people in specific circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

The sufficiency of Scripture provides a framework for biblical counselors to understand the purposes and goals of counseling. The goal for all believers is to glorify God by being transformed into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Biblical counselors see the purpose of counseling as more than changing behavior, circumstances, relieving suffering, or comforting a person. Although these are the result of counseling, they are not the aims of counseling. As Kevin Carson says, “Christlikeness is the goal. Events and circumstances orchestrated and ordained by God are the tools He uses to bring about this goal.”<sup>14</sup> The Scriptures are sufficient for helping a believer respond to life in a way that honors the Lord, along with knowing that God is working all things to bring glory to his

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<sup>11</sup> David Powlison, “Does Biblical Counseling Really Work?,” in Hindson and Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Powlison adds, “Biblical counselors who fail to think through carefully the nature of biblical epistemology run the danger of acting as if Scripture were exhaustive, rather than comprehensive; as if Scripture were an encyclopedic catalogue of all significant facts, rather than God’s revelation of the crucial facts, richly illustrated, that yield a world view sufficient to interpret whatever other facts we encounter; as if Scripture were the whole bag of marbles rather than the eyeglasses through which we interpret all marbles; as if our current grasp of Scripture and people were triumphant and final.” Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” 32.

<sup>13</sup> Powlison says, “While the Bible does provide both the eyeglass (interpretive categories that are true) and a vast number of concrete examples, it never pretends to provide all the examples. God demands that we put on our eyeglasses and think hard, well, and biblically about people.” Powlison, “Does Biblical Counselling Really Work?,” 82.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Carson, “The Richness and Relevance of God’s Word,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *Scripture and Counseling*, 33.

name. Biblical counselors aim for change in a counselee’s thinking, affections, and choices—which points them to faith in Christ. The Scriptures provide what is necessary for counselees to depend on Christ: “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” (2 Pet 1:3). The Bible says that God has given us all things for life and godliness, which is found in the knowledge of him.

The Scriptures are sufficient to provide a framework for biblical counseling, an objective source of truth, an understanding of the ways to apply Scriptures to problems, and the purposes and goals for counseling.<sup>15</sup> The purposes and goals for counseling are Christlikeness and responding to life with faith in Christ, which means that the Scriptures aim at the heart.

### **Sufficiency and the Heart**

The sufficiency of Scripture is the only objective standard of truth that can help humans understand why they do what they do. The Scriptures illuminate people’s understanding of their hearts, which includes thoughts, desires, intentions, actions, and emotions. Biblical counseling is simple, but not simplistic in understanding human motivation. The human heart is the place where the war of desire takes place, which provides insight into why one is motivated to certain actions.<sup>16</sup> It is important to have a definition of desire informed and interpreted by Scripture. The Bible talks about human desire and needs, the nature of desires, and the reorientation of desire.

Desire is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. God created

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<sup>15</sup> Bob Kellemen uses categories to help understand God’s overall purposes. He calls them “theology of life categories: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation (CFRC).” Bob Kellemen, “The Bible Is Relevant for That?” in Kellemen and Forrey, *Scripture and Counseling*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Although Abraham Maslow has a different understanding of human motivation, he understood desires: “The original criterion of motivation and the one that is still used by all human beings . . . is the subjective one. I am motivated when I feel desire or want or yearning or wish or lack.” Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 2nd ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968), 22.

human beings with desire; it is impossible not to desire. In the garden, the serpent tempted Eve in her thoughts (it is okay to eat from the tree), tempted the affections (it is a delight to the eyes), and tempted desire (to make one wise). Eve was motivated by a desire to be like God and gave into temptation. Humans were created with desire; the highest desire is the worship and glory of God. There are good desires and bad desires throughout the storyline of Scripture. Sin entered the world and desire was affected. Now a desire for worship and the glory of God has turned into desire that is selfish, inordinate, and disordered.

Sometimes desire is redefined as a need. Often what began as a desire ends up as a need, which is a focus in some counseling systems.<sup>17</sup> Desire is closely connected to needs, and often these words are used interchangeably in popular language. This causes confusion over how to think biblically about desires and needs. For example, people use “I need” in common everyday language when they really mean “I want.” Counselors often hear “I need respect,” “I need a wife/husband,” or “I need this person to like me.”

There are legitimate needs that people have. Edward Welch helps others understand different categories of needs. He explains that needs are often clustered around three categories: biological needs, spiritual needs, and psychological needs.<sup>18</sup> The last category, psychological needs, leads to a popular view of people that they are empty cups who have needs that must be filled to be happy.<sup>19</sup> Needs are often centered around self and reveal the self-orientation of the heart. There are legitimate needs, such as the biological needs of food and water. There are spiritual needs of every human, specifically

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<sup>17</sup> Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs that consisted of five tiers: physical, security, social, ego, and self-actualization. Neel Burton, “Our Hierarchy of Needs,” *Psychology Today*, May 23, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/201205/our-hierarchy-needs>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997), 138.

<sup>19</sup> Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, 136.

that people need forgiveness of their sins. The psychological needs are an area where desire and need are often intermingled. The Bible speaks more about forgiveness of sins and denying self, rather than focusing on having one's needs met (Matt 16:24). The importance in making the clear distinction is that one can repent of an ungodly need, but one would not repent of a legitimate need. The true need of all people is to be rescued from self, so that one might need Christ more than anything this world offers.

The sufficient Scriptures also help us in this area of understanding desire and needs which reveal the motivations of the heart. Powlison explains, "The simplest way to discover why a person does, says, thinks, or feels certain things is to ask, 'What do you want?'"<sup>20</sup> This question is simple yet explains that behind every desire or need is a pursuit of something (worship). The heart also has feelings, which is another way of saying someone wants something. Pierre says, "People feel their wants."<sup>21</sup> Today when people talk about their feelings, they are revealing their thoughts or desires.

The nature of desire is that they can be both godly and ungodly. Desires are connected to both thinking and choices, and they can reinforce one another. For example, a person may think they need to be married, and a desire begins to grow. Marriage is a good thing, but when it is elevated from a desire to a need, the good desire turns into a bad desire. This is simple, yet complex as the human heart can often be a paradox and deceiving. A good desire can easily turn into a bad desire when it rules a person's heart.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> David Powlison, "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 41.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Jones provides three tests for detecting if a desire has become inordinate, a ruling desire: (1) Does it consume my thoughts? (Do I obsess about it? Does my mind drift to it when I don't have to think about other things like when I am showering?) (2) Do I sin to get it? (Do I manipulate people or situations to get what I want? Do I bargain or nag or try a guilt trip?) (3) Do I sin when I don't get it? (Do I pout or explode or pull away or gossip about someone when he or she doesn't give me my desired thing?). Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 63-64.

Desire often becomes inordinate, disordered, and unruly. It is not that the object of the desire is sinful, but the pursuit of that desire becomes sinful. Powlison says, “The evil in our desires often lies not in what we want but in the fact that we want it too much. Natural affections (for any good thing) become inordinate, ruling cravings.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to state that human desires are meant to be subordinate to the desire to please God.<sup>24</sup> The human heart is often quick to worship the things of creation, rather than the creator (Rom 1:21). This natural bent of the heart is a warning that often desires can start good and then get out of control. An example of a strong desire is found in the Old Testament story of Rachel, who wanted children. Her desire became inordinate and unruly when she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!” (Gen 30:1).

The Scriptures do not call people to deny having desires, but rather to have those desires redirected. Jesus commanded that his followers love him above all else (Matt 22:37) and he connected love for himself with obedience (John 14:15). The Psalmist spoke about delighting in the Lord and receiving the desires of the heart (Ps 37:4). Powlison says, “God does not anesthetize us; He redirects our desires.”<sup>25</sup> This is true if the new desires are godly. Powlison explains it this way: “To make us truly human, God must change what we want; we must learn to want the things Jesus wanted.”<sup>26</sup> This is true at salvation, since a sinner turns from loving sin to hating sin, from hating Christ to loving Christ. Christ died to rescue sinners from self to serving

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<sup>23</sup> Powlison, *Sufficiency of Scripture*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Powlison, *Sufficiency of Scripture*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Powlison, *Sufficiency of Scripture*, 11. Also, Jones argues, “No, the desires are not the problem. In fact, having desires is good—they remind us to pray, to submit ourselves to God, to seek godly directions, and so forth. We must not try to deaden, neuter, or deny our legitimate desires. Instead, we must repent not of the desire but of the ‘ruling-ness’ of the desire, that is, the way it has begun to ascend the throne and become a demand. The desire itself is not evil in view; it is the propensity for it to climb and take over that we must resist.” Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Powlison, *Sufficiency of Scripture*, 12.



Christ (2 Cor 5:14-15), a desire that is brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Inordinate ruling desires do not change quickly. The reality is that God forgives past sins and gives hope for eternity, along with providing power to change here and now. Although the renewal of the heart is a lifelong and incomplete process, change does occur. Thomas Chalmers captures the change vividly when he says, “We have already affirmed how impossible it were for the heart, by any innate elasticity of its own, to cast the world away from it; and thus reduce itself to a wilderness. The heart is not so constitute; and the only way to dispossess it of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one.”<sup>27</sup> The only way for new affections to grow is to have life centered on the person and work of Christ.<sup>28</sup> This is said well by Pierre: “We desire what we pursue, and we pursue what we desire. Faith expresses itself in desiring God more than any of his created benefits.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, biblical counseling seeks to keep Christ as the greatest need and desire of the heart.

The priority of the sufficiency of the Scriptures to counseling is essential in the change process. The Scriptures provide the objective truth that helps explain people and their problems. The Scriptures also provide the purpose and goals of changing into Christlikeness. The Bible helps biblical counselors understand the human heart in all its

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Chalmers suggests a process in cultivating a new affection, “A new affection is more successful in replacing an old affection than simply trying to end it without supplanting it with something better. The ascendant power of a second affection will do, what no exposition however forcible, of the folly and worthlessness of the first, ever could effectuate. . . . It must be by substituting another desire, and another line or habit of exertion in its place—and the most effectual way of withdrawing the mind from one object, is not by turning it away upon desolate and unpeopled vacancy—but by presenting to its regards another object still more alluring.” Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (Minneapolis: Curiosmith, 2012), chap. 1, Kindle.

<sup>28</sup> Jerry Bridges adds, “Yes, the Scriptures are filled with the imperatives of God’s will for us. They are one of the several instruments the Holy Spirit uses to transform us. And, yes, we do have a duty to respond in obedience to those imperatives. But God wants us to desire to do what is our duty to do. He wants us to want to do what we ought to do. And it is the love of Christ as seen in the gospel—it is our response of gratitude for His grace—that gives desire to duty and changes ‘ought to’ to ‘want to.’” Jerry Bridges, *The Transforming Power of the Gospel* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 74.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre, *Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 238.

complexities. The Scriptures are robust to expose the motives of the heart, revealing the desires behind behavior. Therefore, a counseling system that is biblical must prioritize the sufficiency of Scripture.

### **The Priority of Community**

The priority of the body of Christ in addressing the heart is unique to biblical counseling. Believers are united to one another through the gospel of Jesus Christ and are called to be part of a local body of believers. The local body of believers grows and matures together (Eph 4:11-16) and speaks truth into each other's lives (Rom 15:14). There is mutual one-another care (Rom 1:12) and the body provides the context for believers to live out the one-another commands of Scripture. The body of believers provide care for one another that is Bible-centered and Christ-focused. Believers have the most important resource to address one another's heart, the sufficient Scriptures. The body of Christ is the place where believers in everyday relationships are called to speak truth in love and pursue redemptive relationships.

### **Speaking the Truth in Love**

Biblical counseling occurs when believers speak truth from the Scriptures to one another. Paul called believers to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15, 25), which includes both the content of what is communicated and the manner in how the message is delivered.

The content is an objective truth, the authoritative and sufficient Word of God. The Word of God is timeless and unchanging. The truth spoken to each other is not based on one's own desires or goals but focuses back on the Word of God. Jones puts it this way: "Christ-centered counseling is not counselor-centered (seeking to conform people into our desired image) or client-centered (seeking to conform people into their desired

image).”<sup>30</sup> This is important because it recognizes that there is an objective standard of truth, one that is superior to man’s wisdom. Counselors are not conforming man to his own image, but to the image of Christ.<sup>31</sup> Believers are called to speak the truth from God’s Word into each other’s lives, keeping Christ at the center and as the goal. This truth goes deeper than behavior, to address the hearts of people so that their ultimate hope will rest in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

It is also important in the way the message is communicated. Paul exhorts believers to speak the truth “in love.” Truth can be spoken without love, which is why Paul says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Instead, the Scriptures call believers to have a spirit of gentleness with one another (Gal 6:1). The Scriptures spoken in love reveal care for another person. Welch gives a view of how this could look in the body:

Imagine—an interconnected group of people who entrust themselves to each other. You can speak of your pain, and someone responds with compassion and prayer. You can speak of your joys, and someone shares in them with you. You can even ask for help with sinful struggles, someone prays with you, offers hope and encouragement from Scriptures, and sticks with you until sin no longer seems to have the upper hand. There is openness, freedom,

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Jones, “The Christ-Centeredness of Biblical Counseling,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *Scripture and Counseling*, 114.

<sup>31</sup> The Biblical Counseling Coalition describes this well in their definition of gospel-centered counseling: “We point people to a person, Jesus our Redeemer, and not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transforming power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people’s hearts, not in any human system of change. People need a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus, not a system of self-salvation, self-management, or self-actualization. Wise counselors seek to lead struggling, hurting, sinning, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are available only in Christ.” Biblical Counseling Coalition, “Confessional Statement,” July 2018, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>.

<sup>32</sup> Powlison says, “By instinct, habit, and enculturation, all of us tend to think of counseling as a human-with-human interaction. But in fact a human-with-Savior interaction must come first. When I as a counselor don’t get that straight, I inevitably offer others some sort of saviorette. If my counseling does not help others rely upon Another (upon whom I also rely), I will inevitably teach them to rely on themselves—or on me, or other friends, or medications, or techniques, or pabulum ‘truths’ (that are in fact empty or even fictional).” David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 7.

friendships, bearing burdens together, and giving and receiving wisdom. No trite responses. And Jesus is throughout it all.<sup>33</sup>

Welch effectively describes a community of believers speaking the truth in love to one another by coming alongside one another in everyday life. Believers address one another's heart as they live in community with one another, pointing each other back to the Scriptures and Christ. Counseling is more than problem focused, as the conversation is centered on Jesus. There is Christ-like love for one another in an attitude of humility. Welch goes on to say, "If humility does not precede our wisdom and help, our efforts are meaningless."<sup>34</sup> This is true because counsel is not based on man's wisdom, but on the sufficient Scriptures. Also, this recognizes that the counselor and the counselee both need Christ, his grace, and mercy for daily change. The counselor is not above the counselee, but rather is alongside the counselee and understands that Christ is the one above them both.

It is important to keep in mind that this call to "speak the truth in love" is for all those in the body of Christ. The ministry of care for one another is primarily done by believers, not by professionals. Welch says, "And there is just one other qualification. It is this: you are an ordinary person. God has determined that run-of-the-mill people do most of his work—not professionals, not experts."<sup>35</sup> This does not mean that everyone is qualified at the same level to care for one another, but rather that believers can rely on two powerful tools, the Word of God and the Spirit. Paul says that believers are filled with goodness and knowledge and able to instruct one another (Rom 5:14). Welch says, "With the Spirit, we move toward people and are amazed that God uses ordinary people

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<sup>33</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Caring for One Another: Eight Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 12-18.

<sup>34</sup> Welch, *Caring for One Another*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 70.

to do his kingdom work.”<sup>36</sup> It is through ordinary people and relationships that the Lord can help believers grow through speaking the truth in love to one another.

### **Redemptive Relationships**

Relationships in the body of Christ are not mere social interactions, but opportunities to be redemptive.<sup>37</sup> Another way of stating this is that relationships are sanctifying. Powlison says that “by word and deed in relationship, one person truly helps another.”<sup>38</sup> These relationships are brought together by the gospel, where people from all different walks of life (ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic) are now brothers and sisters in Christ. This new body now walks with one another, seeking Jesus together as one body. These relationships serve the purpose of helping one another become more like Jesus.

These relationships provide natural opportunities to be redemptive because believers still battle with sin in their lives. The believer still must battle the flesh and mortify sin daily. An interesting observation is made by Paul Tripp, who says that relationships in the body serve a redemptive purpose: (1) redemptive activity takes place in relationships, (2) God first changes us by drawing people to himself, and (3) relationships are essential to the work God is completing in people.<sup>39</sup> One way in which God works is how people respond to one another in relationships. People become the context for exposing one another’s heart. When two people are in conflict, both hearts are actively responding to God and to each other (Jas 4:1-4). This provides an opportunity for

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<sup>36</sup> Welch also says, “The Spirit gives us the wisdom of God. This wisdom overlaps with wisdom that we can gather from books and careful observations, but it goes deeper. It is wisdom rooted in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. It is crammed with guidance from the Father through Christ—wisdom that we could never discover on our own (1 Cor 1:20-25).” Welch, *Side by Side*, 68-69.

<sup>37</sup> I borrow this phrase “redemptive relationships” from Tripp, who says, “God’s relationship to us is loving and redemptive, and he wants our relationships to mirror those qualities.” Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 120.

<sup>38</sup> Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 123.

sin to be exposed and addressed, which can lead to spiritual growth.<sup>40</sup>

Relationships also require intentionality to be redemptive. One of the most common models of these types of relationships is taught by Tripp. He instructs believers to “love people. Know them. Speak truth into their lives. Help them do what God has called them to do.”<sup>41</sup> To have a relationship that is redemptive is to aim at the heart. Tripp says,

Our behavior is rooted in the thoughts and motives of our hearts. People and situations only prompt our hearts to express themselves in words and actions (Prov 4:23; Luke 6:43-45; Mark 7:20-23; Matt 23:23, James 4:1-10). Without denying the sad realities of suffering and being sinned against, we must reject any view of human behavior that forgets the heart. Instead, we affirm that God changes people’s lives as his grace transforms their hearts. Thus, in personal ministry, no matter what the difficulty, the heart is always our target.<sup>42</sup>

Tripp connects the relationships believers have with one another and the redemptive work that is accomplished in these relationships. Redemptive relationships provide the context for people to love each other, know each other, speak truth to one another, and to help them do what God’s Word calls for (Love, Know, Speak, and Do). Relationships also have a sanctifying aspect as they often expose the selfishness of not wanting to be involved in the arduous process of change. The heart is inconsistent, and relationships can provide both comfort and conviction, helping both the counselor and counselee grow and change.

There must be wisdom in counseling for relationships to be redemptive.

Powlison shares, “Wise counseling is essentially a way of loving another person well. It

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<sup>40</sup> Lane and Tripp say, “Living in community pushes us to die to ourselves. There will be times when loving others and allowing others to serve and love us will feel like death, but this is the pathway to real life in Christ. The more we understand our own hearts, the more we see that it takes a work of God’s grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in redemptive relationships shows us our need for change and helps bring it about!” Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Winston-Salem, NC: New Growth Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>41</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 275.

<sup>42</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 272.

is a way of speaking what is true and constructive into this person's life right now. Good counseling is essentially wise love in action."<sup>43</sup> The best context for this to occur is in the body of Christ. In this context Powlison suggest asking questions. He says, "First, what is this person facing in life? To put it more pointedly, what is your greatest struggle and need right now? . . . Second, what does the Lord say that speaks direction into what you are facing?"<sup>44</sup> These questions can be asked by any person to another and can begin conversations that are redemptive. The questions probe the situation so that the heart can be addressed.<sup>45</sup> For example, how the person responds to the specific struggle is a heart question. Connecting the Lord back to the situation encourages the person to seek the Lord and see his purposes, which could be repentance or pursuing more trust in the Lord. The body of Christ is God's design for mutual one-another care and growth through ordinary everyday conversations.

### **The Priority of the Gospel**

Biblical counseling aims at heart renewal by providing redemptive solutions to both sin and suffering. These redemptive solutions connect Scripture to the issues of life, addressing both sin and suffering, pointing to faith in Jesus. In a post-Genesis 3 world, people are born into sin and everyone will face suffering (to one degree or another). It is impossible to escape the brokenness of the world and the effect sin has had on both people and the creation. Sinners will sin against one another, and suffering can come from one's own sin or by being sinned against. Redemptive solutions focus on the person and work of Christ, a gospel focus aimed at the heart. Mike Emlet says, "This is what the

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<sup>43</sup> Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> A list of 34 X-Ray Questions are provided by Lane and Tripp. As a sample, the following questions are included: "What do you love? What do you want? What do you seek?" Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 163-65.

gospel is all about: the good news that God entered history as a man Jesus to bring about the redemption of a people and a world bound in sin and suffering.”<sup>46</sup> Redemptive solutions reorient the heart by relating the gospel to both sin and suffering, keeping Christ at the center.

### **The Gospel and Sin**

Counselors recognize that counselees are sinners and they seek to apply the gospel to the problem of sin. The aim of counseling is the heart, which goes beneath the surface of behavior to the real motives behind behavior. Sin must be dealt with on the heart level for lasting change to occur. Lane and Tripp say, “There is always something or someone ruling our hearts, and whatever rules our hearts will control our behavior.”<sup>47</sup> The gospel is the remedy to transform hearts. The Scriptures teach where sin came from, how it has affected mankind, and how the gospel provides hope to the hearts of sinners.

Sin entered the world soon after creation in the fall of mankind. The original design of life was perfect in the garden, where man and woman lived in communion with their God. The world was without sin, but it did not last very long. Sin entered the world soon after the creation of man and woman in the garden (Gen 3). Adam and Eve were tempted and gave in to temptation, which brought sin into the world (Rom 5:12). The consequences of sin were quickly seen in the actions of their offspring, Cain and Abel. Cain became angry with God, was jealous of his brother Abel, and eventually murdered him (Gen 4:8). The biblical story traces the problems of life back to the fall, the reality that everyone born is a sinner by both nature and choice.

The effect of sin on people affected their core nature and their hearts were described as wicked, as seen in Genesis 6:5: “The Lord saw the wickedness of man was

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<sup>46</sup> Michael R. Emler, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 6, Kindle.

<sup>47</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 193.



great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” The Lord saw the depths of the heart (intentions and thoughts) and declared that the heart was evil continually. Sinners sin against God (vertically) and against one another (horizontally), and the drama of the wickedness and the impact of sin is traced throughout the book of Genesis and the rest of Scripture.

Although sin and suffering entered the world, God had a plan to provide redemption. The story of the good news began in the garden with the promise of a redeemer (Gen 3:15). The gospel teaches that Jesus came to redeem mankind from sin, to pay the penalty for sin (for man’s justification), break the power of sin (for man’s sanctification), and ultimately to remove the presence of sin (for man’s glorification).

The application of the gospel to man first deals with the primary problem of sin and separation, restoring fellowship with God. The gospel teaches that man can be right with God, having forgiveness of sins and receiving a new heart. This new heart is now being renewed daily. Even though sinners are redeemed, remaining sin is still the problem for every believer. This new relationship with God grants daily mercy (Lam 3:22-23), and grace that motivates change (Titus 2:11-14).

Biblical counselors recognize how sin has affected mankind. People sin and are sinned against, and often people who are sinned against sin in their responses. There is a caution that biblical counseling can become unbalanced, and counselors must be on guard and wise in applying the gospel to life.<sup>48</sup> The truths of the gospel are multifaceted, and one truth cannot be emphasized at the cost of other truths. Redemptive solutions can easily become trite, simple, and formulaic.<sup>49</sup> Powlison gives a fair warning of being

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<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Holmes and Lilly Park describe some ways that truth can become unhelpful: “Reductionism. In this form, counselors take a verse out of context and isolate it from the greater story line of the Bible. . . . Sentimentalism. In this form, the Bible is used in a trite and platitudinous way. . . . Moralism. In this form, the Bible is used moralistically. . . . Legalism. In this form, the Bible is used as a rule book of do’s and don’ts.” Jonathan Holmes and Lilly Park, “Speaking the Truth in Love,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *Scripture and Counseling*, 266-67.

<sup>49</sup> Powlison says, “Here is a core premise: Ministry ‘unbalances’ truth for the sake of

unbalanced in applying Scripture; he says, “In order to actually minister to people, you need wise selectivity, while bearing in mind the fullest possible repertoire of options from which to choose. You do not build a house with only one tool in your toolbox when God gives you a truckload of tools. But you do use your tools one at a time, the right tool for the right job.”<sup>50</sup> This is important because people are complex, and the heart is dynamic. The Scriptures caution this same truth: “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thess 5:14). There are people in different stages, and it takes wisdom and patience to apply truth into their lives.

One way in which biblical counselors need wisdom is in providing hope with a balanced gospel. There is a balance between the indicatives (who we are in Christ) and imperatives (what God commands) of Scripture. Stuart Scott gives a warning, “Too little emphasis on Christ, our position, or our practice gives one a skewed view of the gospel itself and the Christian life also.”<sup>51</sup> If one focuses only on the imperatives without the indicatives, it could lead one to become self-righteous or self-loathing. If one focuses on the indicatives without the imperatives, it could lead one not to make efforts. Scott gives a three-fold way to present a balanced gospel, saying, “A balanced and properly emphasized gospel highlights all three of its aspect with the gospel in a narrow sense being unfolded and practically applied into the gospel in a broad sense, and the gospel in a broad sense being unfolded and applied into gospel practice.”<sup>52</sup> This is important

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relevance; theology ‘rebalances’ truth for the sake of comprehensiveness. Put another way, because you can only say one thing at a time, a timely word must be a selective word focusing on the need of the moment.” David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 33.

<sup>50</sup> Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Scott, “The Gospel in Balance,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Stephen Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 169.

<sup>52</sup> The narrow sense is “Christ’s Life, Death, and Resurrection,” and the broad sense is “all salvation means to us.” Scott, “The Gospel in Balance,” 169.

because it recognizes people often tend toward extremes, and counselors need to present the entire gospel.

The aim and goal of biblical counseling is a transformation in the heart with a growing faith in Christ (Titus 2:11-14). Scott says, “It is all about the preeminent person of Jesus Christ, who should make a difference in our daily living.”<sup>53</sup> This is important because it is easy to become problem-focused and not Christ-focused. This also protects against thinking that there is a magic bullet that will solve everyone’s problem. The gospel is the core message that provides hope because it provides a redeemer, but it takes wisdom to apply this to the heart that can often be a mystery. Counselees are responsible for their pursuit of God, but only God can change the heart. Jerry Bridges explains the tension when he calls believers to live in “dependent responsibility.”<sup>54</sup> Man is both dependent on God to work, and responsible to change (Phil 2:13).

### **The Gospel and Suffering**

Biblical counseling recognizes that counselees are sufferers, and provides comfort to sufferers in a broken world. Not only was sin introduced into the world, but suffering became a normal reality. The Lord judged the serpent, Eve, and Adam (Gen 3:14-19). There would be suffering in childbirth, relational problems, and the land would produce thorns and thistles. The Bible records both suffering that was due to sin (Adam and Eve), and other suffering that was due to another’s sins (Cain and Abel).<sup>55</sup> All of this suffering occurs with the reality of a sovereign God who has a purpose in suffering. The gospel can help bring redemptive solutions to suffering, reveal the one who had the greatest suffering, point to a sovereign God, and aim at the heart’s response.

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<sup>53</sup> Scott, “The Gospel in Balance,” 169.

<sup>54</sup> Bridges, *Transforming Power of the Gospel*, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Some suffering, such as the man born blind in John 9:1-34, cannot be explained by sin.

The gospel is good news that includes the ultimate example of suffering. Jesus, who was sinless came into a world broken by sin and faced human suffering. He experienced being rejected by man, unjustly tried, physically beaten, deserted by his followers, given the most brutal death on a cross, and experienced separation from the Father as he took on the penalty and punishment for man (1 Pet 2:22-25). Jesus, our sympathetic High Priest, understands the suffering that occurs on this earth (Heb 4:14-16). Redemptive solutions explain that God is in control and can use suffering for a greater purpose. The reminder of the good news helps counselees know that the Savior is one who understands suffering, and cares deeply when his people suffer.

Suffering occurs in the context of God's sovereignty, which includes his purposes. Lane and Tripp state that the redemptive purpose in suffering is to bring about "hope in a fallen world."<sup>56</sup> This is what the Scriptures proclaim in 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." God is sovereign over suffering and is using it to transform the heart, and to provide an eternal hope in a God who will wipe away every tear.

Lane and Tripp also give a paradigm to help understand suffering. They say purposeful suffering leads to experiencing God's comfort, which produces the ability to comfort others, resulting in a community of hope.<sup>57</sup> First, suffering draws people to God's comfort. This faith in God fills one with hope. As this hope is realized, the believer can then look outward to others who are suffering and give them hope (2 Cor 1:4). This produces a community filled with hope.

Often suffering can make one aware of his or her heart responses. No one wants to suffer unnecessarily, but the reality is that everyone will face some degree of suffering. The response to suffering reveals the heart. These responses can be a demand

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<sup>56</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 154.

for explanation, anger, bitterness, and a desire for quick comfort. Biblical counselors do not quickly judge these natural responses, but gently point people from circumstances back to faith in Christ. Suffering is a tool that God can use for the greatest spiritual growth as the heart is changed through trusting faith, patience, and repentance.

Sin and suffering do not have the last word, the gospel does. The gospel of Christ reminds both biblical counselors and counselees that Jesus came to this world to bring redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope to endure suffering.

Biblical counselors prioritize redemptive solutions for the sin and suffering that is experienced on earth. The gospel truth changes everything and biblical counselors strive to connect people's stories with Scripture, and people's hearts to faith in Christ. The priority is renewing the heart where transformation begins, trusting in the Spirit who works through a variety of ways to change people into the image of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Biblical counseling is focused on heart renewal because true change begins in the heart. There is a priority on the sufficiency of Scripture, one-another care in the body, and redemptive solutions to sin and suffering. The authoritative and sufficient Scriptures provide the foundation for counseling, one-another care provides the context for counseling, and redemptive solutions to sin and suffering provide the hope for counseling. Biblical counselors put their trust in Jesus, not in methods or techniques. The sovereign Lord works through his Word and his Spirit to renew hearts that find faith in Jesus and exhibit Christlikeness.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Biblical counseling was a new concept to many at Mount Ararat Bible Church (MABC). Many were familiar with counseling in a professional model, but the idea of church-based counseling was a new concept. The elders at MABC supported biblical counseling and wanted the congregation to grow in understanding how the Word of God addresses the difficulties of life. The purpose of this project was to introduce leaders at MABC to biblical counseling so that there would be more intentional discipleship in the body. I decided to narrow down the introduction to biblical counseling by focusing on Christ-centered change. This decision allowed both an introduction to the main concepts of biblical counseling along with the opportunity to apply those truths to the participants' lives. The project was implemented in three stages: (1) selection of participants, (2) preparation of the curriculum, and (3) teaching the curriculum.

#### **Selection of Participants**

The primary participants for the class were leaders at MABC, and secondarily others who were interested in learning about biblical counseling. The senior pastor announced the class offering during Sunday morning announcements and asked those interested to sign up for the class. Those who signed up received a link for the Counseling Assessment Survey (a hard copy was given to those who did not want to do the online survey). The survey included three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) general questions (testimony, understanding of counseling), and (3) counseling questions with a Likert scale. There was interest from 39 people who served in different areas in the church (deacons, Sunday school teachers, and community group leaders). An average of

25 participants came to the eight-week class. Some of the participants were potential leaders who wanted to learn about biblical counseling. The survey data was used to assess the current understanding of counseling in general along with the leaders' understanding of how the Bible describes people, problems, and solutions.

### **Preparation of Curriculum**

An eight-week teaching curriculum was developed, "The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change." There were eight topics chosen along with a practice problem to show how to apply the lesson to the participants' lives.<sup>1</sup> The curriculum was designed for someone new to biblical counseling and included key concepts such as the sufficiency of Scripture, the centrality of the heart, and the implications of the gospel to sin and suffering. Along with the curriculum, a selection of eight journal articles from *Journal of Biblical Counseling* were included for homework. A three-person expert panel reviewed the curriculum and provided feedback that was used for revisions. The survey data was also considered for the revision to the curriculum.

### **Teaching the Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change**

The participants who completed the survey were invited to the eight-week course taught on Thursday evenings at MABC. The duration of each session was one and a half hours, which included a lecture and time for discussion and questions. The sessions were recorded and uploaded to a private YouTube channel for those who missed a week. Participants were provided class notes and journal articles for homework.

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<sup>1</sup> The eight topics and corresponding practice problems were (1) Introduction—What is Biblical Counseling? (2) The Bible and Counseling—Does Scripture address the real problems of life? (3) The Centrality of the Heart, Pt 1—Why do I do the things I do? (4) The Centrality of the Heart, Pt 2—Why do I struggle with sin? (5) The Gospel and Sin—How does the gospel address my remaining sin? (6) The Gospel and Suffering—How does the gospel address my suffering? (7) The Priority of Addressing the Heart—How does my heart change? And finally, (8) Counseling One-Another—How do I help others change?

## **Lesson 1: Introduction—What Is Biblical Counseling?**

The focus of the first lesson was to answer the question, “What is Biblical Counseling?” There were three goals with this first lesson: (1) to introduce the distinctives of biblical counseling, (2) to understand the difference between biblical counseling and other models of counseling, and (3) to introduce the fundamentals of Christ-centered change.

I began the lesson by discussing the way in which the term *counseling* is normally used in everyday language. The group discussed how most people use the word counseling in a professional sense (therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist). There was a discussion on how counseling has negative connotations, such as a person feels they need counseling when they are stuck in life. I explained that counseling is commonly used in a formal sense (one-on-one) and usually not informally (everyday relationships).

The first section surveyed a brief history of counseling. I explained that in the Puritan era, pastors practiced counseling in the church. Many of the Puritans wrote about soul problems, such as William Bridge’s *A Lifting Up for the Downcast* and John Owen’s *The Mortification of Sin*.<sup>2</sup> In the discussion of the modern era I talked about how counseling was taken out of the church and put into a professional model, primarily influenced by Sigmund Freud. I told them that in the 1970s Jay Adams desired to bring counseling back into the church and called on pastors to care for the problems that their congregants faced.

I then discussed the distinctives of biblical counseling, using the 12 distinctives from the Biblical Counseling Coalition confessional statement.<sup>3</sup> One area I emphasized was that biblical counseling focuses on Christ. I explained that other models of

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<sup>2</sup> William Bridge, *A Lifting Up for the Downcast* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1961); John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Biblical Counseling Coalition, “Confessional Statement,” November 2019, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>.



counseling can produce change but that the goal of biblical counseling was to connect the counselee and their problems back to Christ. I provided a chart of the differences between biblical counseling and other models of counseling.<sup>4</sup> First, I explained that biblical counseling sees man as both a sinner and sufferer, focuses on the heart, uses the Word of God, emphasizes the Spirit, and is oriented toward growing and changing into Christlikeness. Then I compared this to professional models that explain man's problems coming from their nature or nurture, focus on behavior and symptoms, use the *DSM-5* and man-made theories, prescribe therapy and medication, and has the goal of mental health, symptom relief, and a change in behavior.

I ended the lesson by going over the outline of topics for the eight weeks. I explained that the purpose of the course was lifelong growing and changing to reflect Christlikeness in people's beliefs, thoughts, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. For homework, I asked them to read Edward Welch's article, "What Is Biblical Counseling, Anyway?"<sup>5</sup> I also asked them to think about this question for their lives: "Identify one specific area in your life in which you believe God wants to change you."

## **Lesson 2: The Bible and Counseling**

The focus of the second lesson was to learn about the importance of the Bible for biblical counseling. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand the unique nature of the Bible, (2) the importance of the Bible to understand humanity, and (3) to gain an understanding of the fundamentals of Christ-centered change.

I began the lesson by helping the class understand the importance of the right foundation. I proposed the question, "Can the Bible really help me with my problems in

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Welch, "What Is Biblical Counseling, Anyway?" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (1997): 2-6.

life?” I explained that if the Bible is not central in counseling, another source of knowledge and authority will be used. I explained that this distinction is important because one’s source of knowledge will influence his or her understanding of the nature of the problem, the solution, and the goals.

Addressing one’s sources of knowledge led to conversations about Scripture for the rest of the class, including how the Bible is unique, sufficient for biblical counseling, and can help people understand themselves.

I talked about how the Bible is unique because it is inspired by God, which means God used human instruments to speak his Word (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3). I explained that since the Bible is inspired by God, the Bible is trustworthy, inerrant, and infallible (Ps 19:7-14). The Bible is inspired by God and trustworthy, therefore the Bible is authoritative. I summarized the sufficiency of Scripture with the term *framework* to help the class see that the Bible is sufficient, not exhaustive. The Bible is not an encyclopedia but provides the framework to understand people, problems, and solutions. Lastly, I said that the Bible is sufficient for all of life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

The corollaries from the nature of Scripture led to an introduction on how to understand people by looking at human motivation. I provided a chart that showed how Scripture talks about the motives of the heart, including ruling desires, demands, false gods, idols, masters, rulers, treasures, expectations, and foundations.<sup>6</sup> There was discussion on how Scripture exposes hearts and goes deeper than external behavior. The class did an exercise looking at Genesis 3:1-7 and discussed how the Bible describes the motives of Eve’s heart.

I ended the lesson by reminding them that the goal of counseling is growing and changing. I explained that the change process is not an event but a process. This process is not about behavior modification or symptom relief but rather an inward change

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 4.

that leads to growth and change into Christlikeness in beliefs, thoughts, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. For homework I asked them to read David Powlison's article "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls."<sup>7</sup> I also asked them to consider how Scripture speaks into the problem areas of their lives and reveals the motives of their hearts.

### **Lesson 3: The Centrality of the Heart, Part 1**

The focus of the third lesson was on the importance of the centrality of the heart. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand how the Bible uses the term *heart*, (2) to begin to understand why people do the things they do, and (3) to understand that the heart is central to understanding the believer's continual struggle with sin and hope for transformation into Christlikeness.

I began the lesson by presenting a question, "Why do I do the things I do?" This led to exploring the cause behind behavior. I presented two common views in psychology, the nature-versus-nurture debate. I shared a quote from *Psychology Today* that explained these views.<sup>8</sup> I then explained that the Bible presents a different view that is focused on the heart. I stated that biblical counseling focuses on the heart as the root cause of all behavior and that people and circumstances can influence a person but can never cause him or her to act or react.

Then the group began to look at how the Bible uses the term *heart*. I used

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<sup>7</sup> David Powlison, "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 2-14.

<sup>8</sup> "Why do we do what we do? Why are we the way we are? What makes us different from each other? These kinds of questions naturally intrigue us. Historically, they have been approached through one of two perspectives. First, the nature perspective suggests that human behavior is driven mostly by biology (evolution, genetics, brain chemistry, and hormones). In contrast, the nurture perspective suggests that behavior is driven mostly by the psychosocial environment (for example, how we were raised, our peers, the situations we are in at present)." Andy Tix, "Why Do We Do What We Do?" *Psychology Today*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-pursuit-peace/201610/why-do-we-do-what-we-do>).

Jeremy Pierre's diagram of the dynamic heart to explain the three functions of the heart: cognitive, affective, and volition. I showed from Scripture that these all come out of the heart (Mark 8:17; Ps 37:4; Acts 5:4).<sup>9</sup> The diagram was also used to show how all of these functions are interrelated.

Two primary Scriptures were explored to understand the heart. The first was Mark 7:14-23, and the main point was that the heart is the source of behavior. The passage showed that Jesus focused more on internal responses than external behavior. The second text was James 4:1-14, and the main point was that the heart directs behavior. This passage reveals that the desires of the heart direct behavior.

The group briefly talked about how desires practically direct people's lives. I used two questions to help them think about their desires, which they could use to evaluate if their desires were ruling their hearts. I asked them if their desire was for something good or bad, and then asked how they respond if their desires are not fulfilled. I then explained that desires function best when they are submitted to God.

I ended the lesson by reminding them that the goal is Christ-centered change that leads to growth and into Christlikeness in beliefs, thoughts, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. For homework I asked them to read Michael Emler's article, "Understanding the Influence on the Human Heart."<sup>10</sup> I also asked them to think about what their problem area reveals about what is inside their heart (thoughts, desires, and choices).

#### **Lesson 4: The Centrality of the Heart, Part 2**

The focus of the fourth lesson was a further discussion on the centrality of the

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<sup>9</sup> For this image, see Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Michael R. Emler, "Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 47-52.

heart. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand how the heart changes at initial salvation, (2) to understand how the Bible talks about continual change after salvation, and (3) to begin to think biblically about why believers still struggle with sin.

I began the lesson by presenting a question, “Why do I struggle with sin?” I explained that this question could be posed as, “If I am a new creation in Christ, why do I still struggle with sin?” I explained that the new heart is still in need of renewal which is not completed until heaven. The result of the new creation is a new heart, but not a perfect one. There is a tension in Scripture between the redeemed heart and the struggle with remaining sin. There were two texts of Scripture to describe this tension.

The first Scripture the group looked at was 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, which details how Paul describes the hope of a new heart. Paul taught that “in Christ” believers become new creations and the process of transformation begins. Paul taught that there is a new reality, new creation, new relationship, and a new righteousness. I explained that the new creation is connected to a new identity. One in Christ is now identified by the righteousness of Christ and not by behavior. I helped them to see that their position (standing with God) was accomplished by Jesus’ death, and now they begin to live out practical righteousness each day. I explained that this is one side of the tension.

I used an illustration of holding a rope to explain the tension of being a new creation and the struggle over sin. I had them picture in their mind holding a rope on one end. I then explained that if I came along and grabbed the other end and we both pulled, there would be a tension. Both sides pull equally in the opposite direction. I explained that a believer has the Holy Spirit and that there is an opposition in the heart. The tension is the flesh versus the Spirit and that becoming a new creation guarantees a battle in the heart.

This led to a discussion on Galatians 5:16-25. Paul taught in this text the struggle with sin and how believers should respond. I explained that the conflict inside a believer is the old flesh versus the Holy Spirit. The text showed that the believer has been

crucified with Christ and that the Spirit residing inside a believer is stronger than the old flesh. This idea of being crucified does not remove the presence of sin, but rather God gives the Spirit to battle against sin. I explained that believers are called to dependence on God by walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, living by the Spirit, and keeping in step with the Spirit. I also explained that no one can change his or her own heart, since the Spirit changes the heart.

I summarized the tension by explaining that Christ-centered change is an already-not yet experience; believers are already sanctified in Christ, but not yet fully sanctified. In other words, the believer is fighting from victory, not for victory. I reminded them that change is a process, life-long growing and changing to reflect Christlikeness in one's beliefs, thoughts, motives, desires, emotions, and actions through a dynamic relationship with Jesus. For homework I asked them to read David Powlison's article, "How Does Sanctification Work (Part 1)."<sup>11</sup> I also asked them to consider how the tension of the already-not yet experience helps them to think about remaining sin in their hearts.

### **Lesson 5: The Gospel and Sin**

The focus of the fifth lesson was relating the gospel to remaining sin. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand how the gospel relates to remaining sin, (2) to understand the provisions in Christ that believers possess, and (3) to think about how to apply the truths of the gospel for Christ-centered change.

I began the lesson by presenting a question, "How do the truths of the gospel help Christians deal with remaining sin?" I explained that the gospel message is the declaration of what God has done for sinners through Christ for salvation. The truths of the gospel not only save people from eternal death, but they also help believers address

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<sup>11</sup> David Powlison, "How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 1)," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 49-66.

the remaining sin in their hearts.

First, I looked at the reality of sin. This was a reminder of how sin entered the world and affected everything. I reminded them that sin entered the world in Genesis 3 and that the sin nature is passed down to every human being (Rom 5:12). Sin is more than external behavior but begins in the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Gen 6:5). I told them that redemption changes people but that redeemed sinners still struggle with sin (Gal 5:16-25). I also reminded them that people sin both vertically (against God) and horizontally (against one another).

Secondly, I looked at the plan of redemption. I showed them that after sin entered the world, there was a promise from God to bring about redemption (Gen 3:15). I explained Jesus' redeeming works deals completely with sin. The penalty of sin is paid for (justification), the power of sin is dealt with (sanctification), and the presence of sin will one day be erased (glorification).

Third, I looked at the reality of remaining sin. I shared a diagram to explain that as time progresses, a believer becomes aware of both God's grace and remaining sin.<sup>12</sup> As believers mature in faith, they should grow in both directions resulting in a greater view of Christ's love and sacrifice.

The reality of remaining sin led to the final point on how the gospel helps address sin. I used the categories of the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> I explained that believers need both. The group discussed how emphasizing one or the other can lead one in the wrong direction. If a believer emphasizes only the indicatives, this may lead to laziness about growth and change. If a believer emphasizes only the imperatives, this could lead one to relate to God based on performance. I reminded them

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<sup>12</sup> See appendix 7.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Scott, "The Gospel in Balance," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Stephen Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 169.

that there is no formula for change and growth, but Christ must be kept at the center. I wanted them to see that the imperatives flow out of the indicatives; that they help inform believers with right motivations for living out their faith.

I ended the lesson by reminding them that the truths of the gospel help believers with remaining sin. The Scriptures teach believers the right motives for their behavior. True change comes when the heart is addressed, not merely behavior. For homework, I asked them to read David Powlison's article, "How Does Sanctification Work (Part 2)."<sup>14</sup> I also asked them to consider how the gospel indicatives and imperatives address the problem area in their lives.

### **Lesson 6: The Gospel and Suffering**

The sixth lesson focused on how the gospel relates to suffering. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand how the gospel addresses suffering, (2) to understand how suffering reveals human hearts, and (3) to understand how God uses suffering to change people.

I began the lesson by presenting a question, "How do the truths of the gospel address suffering?" I set the tone for the lesson by reading from 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and 2 Corinthians 4:17, where Paul explains one of God's purposes in suffering (comfort and eternal hope). I explained that no one is free from suffering; rather, it is to what degree one will suffer and how one will respond. I also said that suffering comes with different frequencies. In a discussion on how to understand the word *suffering*, the class shared words such as "pain, trial, and struggle."

My first point was that the Bible gives many vivid examples of suffering in the Bible. I shared four different pictures of suffering from the Bible. I began with the first sufferers, Adam and Eve (Gen 3:18-19). I reminded them that suffering came into the

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<sup>14</sup> David Powlison, "How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 2)," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (2013): 35-50.



world soon after sin. There was pain in childbirth and futility of work (thorns and thistles). I connected this to Romans 8:18-25 where Paul speaks about how the creation groans waiting for redemption. Secondly, I shared how the innocent suffer. Abel was murdered by his brother Cain. The third picture was the one who suffered with no direct cause. This was seen in the man born blind (John 9:1-34). I explained that the disciples thought the man's parents had sinned which caused him to be born blind. This revealed their framework of thinking, which attributed this man's suffering to sin. The story revealed that it was not due to his parents' sin, but rather God was working in and through his life to display the works of God. The last example was the suffering Savior (Isa 53). I explained that Jesus was the ultimate sufferer and can understand any suffering people go through, even though one may not be able to understand. I allowed them some time to think of other pictures of suffering in the Bible and I received examples such as Joseph, Jacob, Hannah, Mary the mother of Jesus, John, and the disciples. I shared that the Bible does not avoid the reality of suffering.

After discussing the pictures of suffering in the Bible, I talked about how the implications of the gospel help believers deal with suffering. I explained that Jesus understands suffering and that he deeply cares about his people. I also emphasized that Jesus redeemed believers from eternal suffering but does not prevent earthly suffering. This helps believers reorient their hearts to realize that suffering is temporary and for this life only.

The third point addressed how suffering changes people. I explained that suffering exposes hearts. I said that there are two ways that hearts are exposed. First, the false hopes of people's hearts come out. Suffering reveals if one's hope is in the temporary nature of this world or in God. Secondly, I said that suffering reveals sinful responses. These responses can be anger, bitterness, demand for explanation, and a desire for a quick fix. I explained that suffering can be used to draw us closer to Christ or push one away from Christ.

I summarized the lesson by telling the class that there is a tension. In one sense suffering is very hard and should not be minimized. At the same time, suffering does not negate the promises of God, and the gospel has to be exalted. There needs to be wisdom in one's words during times of suffering, but circumstances do not negate the promises of God. I said that all people will suffer in this life, that the truths of the gospel give hope for temporal suffering, and that suffering is a tool that the Lord can use to expose hearts and draw believers to dependence on him. For homework I asked them to read David Powlison's article, "How Does Sanctification Work (Part 3)."<sup>15</sup> I also asked them to consider how the problem areas in their lives included suffering and to think about how God can use that to change them and deepen their trust in Him.

### **Lesson 7: The Priority of Addressing the Heart**

The focus of the seventh lesson was on the topic of the priority of addressing the heart. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to understand how to address the issues of the heart, (2) to recognize the process of change in people's lives, and (3) to think about how to put these truths into daily practice.

I began the lesson with two Scriptures that give hope for change, 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Colossians 3:1-4; these are reminders that God is at work changing his people but that the work will be completed when they are in glory. After thinking about hope from God's Word, I gave some cautions when addressing the heart. These were areas that can be hindrances in the change process. The cautions were to avoid being simplistic, reductionistic, formulaic, unbalanced, unrealistic, wrong focused, idealistic, impractical, impatient, and having morbid introspection. I said that I have found myself in some of those categories and one should be aware of the subtle nature of those hindrances to

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<sup>15</sup> David Powlison, "How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 3)," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, no. 1 (2017): 9-32.

change.

I then talked about how to address the heart. I reminded them that the heart is always active: thoughts, beliefs, desires, motives, words, emotions, and actions. I used Pierre's diagram of the "dynamic heart in relationship" to explain how the heart responds to those around it (God, others, self, and circumstances).<sup>16</sup> In order to address the heart, I explained the need to read, reflect, relate, and renew the heart. I used an illustration from Numbers 20:1-5 to help the class go through this exercise, and discussed how the Israelite's hearts were being exposed in their difficult circumstances. I told them there are other models to view the heart and change, such as the three-trees model developed by Powlison.<sup>17</sup> I said that they are all similar in that they are dealing with the heart.

I then looked at important reminders when addressing the heart. I explained that people are always responding in either godly or ungodly ways, which come out of the heart. There is a redeemer, and not a system, that helps people in the change process. A person's responsibility is to respond in faith to Jesus who promises to forgive, provide help, and power to change. One aspect of responding to Jesus is through repentance of behavioral and heart sins. I then reminded them that God is really changing them.

I ended the lesson by explaining one subtle way in which the change process is hindered. This happens when Christ is no longer the focus, but self. Instead of Christ being at the center, a person focusses only on their performance. I summarized it by saying that people change by Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. I then reminded them of the goal of life-long growing and changing to reflect Christlikeness in one's beliefs, thoughts, motives, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. For homework I asked them to read, "How Christ Changes Us by

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre, *Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 103. This can also be seen in appendix 5, figure A1.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne, *Real Change: Becoming More Like Jesus in Everyday Life*, ed. David Powlison (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 9-12.

His Grace” by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lesson 8: Counseling One Another**

The focus of the final lesson was on the topic of counseling one another. There were three goals in the lesson: (1) to learn how the Bible calls believers to care for one another, (2) to see the purpose of relationships as redemptive, and (3) to learn ways to counsel one another’s hearts.

I began the lesson by emphasizing two Scriptures that address relationships in the body, Romans 15:14 and Ephesians 4:15-16. I reminded them that the Lord saves people individually and then puts them into a community of faith. This community is made up of people at different stages of their Christian walk who continually need to grow and change.

Believers are placed in a local body of believers with a purpose. I explained that the community is the place where people help one another become more like Jesus. The community provides an opportunity for hearts to be exposed, such as when there is conflict (Jas 4:1-4). I also explained the goal of change is conformity to Christ, not to personal standards of belief and conduct.

The second section was on the practical steps necessary to counsel one another. First, I talked about who is qualified to help. I explained that the Lord uses ordinary individuals who have the sufficient Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, I used Robert Jones’ three step model for how to help one another: (1) enter his/her world, (2) understand his/her need, and (3) bring him/her Christ and his answers.<sup>19</sup> I used an example of how they would counsel someone who just lost their home in a fire

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, “How Christ Changes Us by His Grace,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 15-21.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Jones, “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” (lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, Summer 2019).

and is asking the question “why.” It allowed an opportunity for the class to think carefully, to not speak too quickly, and to meditate on the hope found in Scripture (primarily in God’s character). The group also talked about how the Psalms remind believers of God’s character and help in time of need.

I ended the lesson and the class by reminding them that the goal is life-long growing and changing to reflect Christlikeness in their beliefs, thoughts, motives, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. I provided the class with a list of resources and websites for further learning. I reminded them that this class was meant to introduce them to the idea of biblical counseling and provide a foundation for any further training they may desire. I sent a follow up survey to those who participated in the class.

### **Conclusion**

“The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change” was a first step to introducing biblical counseling to MABC. The class provided key concepts to help leaders understand the importance of biblical counseling, encouraging some to seek further training. The senior pastor was encouraged by the class and asked for me to offer it again. Others mentioned that this class would be important for the entire body to go through. Many were beginning to see how the principles of biblical counseling could help them in their own lives, and in the lives of those in the body.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The elders at Mount Ararat Bible Church (MABC) believe that biblical counseling is an important facet of discipleship and wanted to strengthen this aspect of the church's ministry. The elders recognized that there are many in the congregation who are struggling to apply the Scriptures to their difficulties in life. People were seeking solutions; some would come to the pastors for help, whereas others tried secular counseling and did not find answers to their problems. While there is a high view of God and Scripture, the idea of using the Bible instead of professional counseling was a foreign concept. There was not an opposition to the idea of counseling; rather, there was a gap in understanding the role of counseling in relation to the church. There were many difficult counseling cases before and during the project that reminded me of the need to help the body understand biblical counseling, and to encourage the leaders of the sufficiency and power of God's Word to address problems.

The intent of this project was to introduce biblical counseling to a congregation that was new to the idea of counseling within the church. The announcement of the course brought a mixed reaction. One dear saint who was only exposed to secular counseling thought the idea of counseling from the Bible was a bit odd, but she was willing to learn. Others who worked in the secular counseling field were open to learning but came with hesitation and many questions. Many were really excited to learn how to help others and to grow in their own Christian lives.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to introduce leaders at MABC to biblical

counseling in order to strengthen the culture of counseling one another in the church. The project grew out of a need to strengthen intentional discipleship in the body. Many of the leaders had a high view of Scripture, but there was a weakness in how to apply the Scriptures to the difficulties of life. Introducing leaders to biblical counseling would help influence the culture of the church so that the body would seek God and his Word first, instead of pursuing secular sources.

I fulfilled the purpose of the project through an eight-week introduction to biblical counseling seminar called “The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change.” This class introduced leaders to many of the core ideas of biblical counseling, such as the sufficiency of Scripture, the centrality of the heart, and practical ways to care for one another. The curriculum challenged participants to first look at their own need of change and then to reflect on how to apply those principles to others.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

The project included three goals that were used to determine effectiveness. The first goal was to assess a group of leaders for their current level of knowledge and disposition toward counseling.<sup>1</sup> This goal would be accomplished when 15 leaders completed the survey. A total of 37 people completed the survey.<sup>2</sup> The data provided helpful information on how people felt about and understood counseling. An open-ended question was asked: “How would you define counseling?” One person responded, “Counseling in a traditional sense, and in my experience, is done with a psychologist and/or other licensed therapist. More often than not there is a disconnect, and the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Leaders included pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, community group leaders, and others who serve in roles that lead others. Some lay people who were interested in learning about the topic were allowed to attend.

<sup>2</sup> The initial survey was open to the entire congregation since I thought it would be useful to gain a better understanding of how a larger sample of the congregation understood counseling. This helped narrow down the interest of those who would attend the seminar.

process feels dry and scientific.” Another person responded, “Biblical counseling changes the heart and mind to align with God’s Word, Scripture. It teaches how to apply Scripture to a particular problem (sin) and resolve it.”

I used a five-point Likert scale which included 20 survey questions. Sixty-seven percent of the participants strongly agreed that the Bible provides answers to sin and suffering, but only 51 percent strongly agreed that the Bible is sufficient for the difficulties of life.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-one percent of the participants strongly agreed that their heart is the source of behavior, and 10 percent strongly agreed that other people make them angry. Fifty-six percent of the participants strongly agreed that the church should provide counseling, while 13 percent strongly disagreed that counseling should be left to licensed counselors.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to introduce leaders to biblical counseling.<sup>4</sup> The curriculum introduced biblical counseling by focusing on the need for change. The seminar was called “The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change.” A three-person expert panel reviewed the curriculum and the results exceeded the 90 percent benchmark.<sup>5</sup> The expert panel reviewed the curriculum on the basis of interpretation of Scripture, soundness regarding the heart, clarity of thought, application to counseling scenarios, and helpfulness to someone new to biblical counseling. One reviewer commented, “This is an excellent introduction to someone new to biblical counseling.” Another reviewer expressed, “Excellent use of Scripture and material on the heart.”

The third goal was to increase knowledge and disposition toward counseling

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<sup>3</sup> I used Google Forms for the survey, and Google aggregated the data to provide these analytics.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 6.

<sup>5</sup> The three-person expert panel consisted of the senior pastor at MABC, a local member of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), and a seminary professor in biblical counseling.



by teaching the curriculum. I taught the curriculum over eight weeks to an average of 25 people.<sup>6</sup> The sessions were held on Thursday evenings from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm over eight consecutive weeks. I administered a pre- and post-survey to measure the results of the 22 participants.<sup>7</sup> The t-test was selected for this analysis as it compares the means of the scores from the pre-test and post-test, which measured counseling knowledge and disposition among a select group of leaders. The course introducing biblical counseling made a positive statistical difference, resulting in the increase of knowledge and disposition toward counseling ( $t_{(21)} = 3.71, p < 0.05$ ).<sup>8</sup>

The average total of the pre-survey was 90, and that of the post-survey was 96.<sup>9</sup> The counseling assessment included 20 questions to assess the current knowledge and disposition toward counseling. The pre- and post-survey showed that there was a positive change in 18 of 20 questions. Table 1 below shows the questions with the largest positive change and two questions that had negative changes.<sup>10</sup>

I taught two lessons on the heart and was encouraged to see a positive change in the responses regarding the heart as the source of behavior. I noticed a negative change in the statement “other people often make me angry,” but this result could be attributed to how the question was asked. Overall, the participants had a positive change in their disposition and knowledge of biblical counseling. A few participants left comments on their form about the class. One person said, “I got a lot out of it, especially the two-week sessions on the heart.” Another said, “The seminar helped me to better understand what it means to call oneself a Christian. The word faith has taken on greater meaning. I now try

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<sup>6</sup> Sessions were recorded and available to those who missed a class.

<sup>7</sup> I excluded those who did not complete either the pre- or post-survey.

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 8.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix 9 for full results of all 20 questions.

<sup>10</sup> The maximum score for these categories was 132.

to examine how I feel, what I think, and how I behave, act and speak through a different lens.” Others thanked me in person and told me that they learned a lot about themselves and saw areas in which they needed to grow and change.

Table 1. Pre- and post-project counseling assessment results sample

Question	Pre-project CA	Post-project CA	Change
Counseling is only for people with big problems in life.	100	116	16
Believers should not struggle with sin.	95	109	14
My heart is the source of my behavior.	108	122	14
I feel adequate to counsel other believers.	77	92	15
I am confident that I provide helpful counsel to others.	80	94	14
The Bible has answers to help with sin and suffering.	124	122	-2
Other people often make me angry.	81	70	-11

### Strengths of the Project

The first strength of the project was the focus on the centrality of the heart in biblical counseling. There were two lessons on the centrality of the heart which focused on the causation behind behavior, and the process of sanctification in a believer’s life. I explained that the term *heart* is a word to describe the inner nature, and that people’s lives are directed by what is controlling and filling their hearts. Participants were challenged to reflect upon their own lives and examine their heart responses. A few people shared how they saw their lives in a new way, understanding the depths of their sin. One of the deacons who had walked with the Lord for over thirty years commented on how he saw pride in his heart in a new way and that he wanted to see change in his life. He expressed how thankful he was to see new insights into what was on the inside. The lesson on the desires and motivations of the heart was also helpful, to think deeply

on what influences behavior. The focus on the heart helped to reorient the participants to a more balanced understanding of the redeemed heart and the struggle with remaining sin, while pointing them back to the hope that is found in Jesus.

The second strength was the journal articles that were assigned for homework. The articles took about an hour to read each week. This amount of time was manageable for those who attended, and went deeper into the topics of each lesson. The articles were discussed at the beginning of class. The articles helped reinforce the ideas that were taught along with allowing time for reflection during the week. A few people mentioned that these articles really helped them understand biblical counseling and how it was different than other forms of counseling.<sup>11</sup> One person mentioned that she struggled for a long time with understanding sanctification. She said that one of the statements by Powlison was stunning: “Sanctification is not really interested in making you a better individual. God is making you into a person who is more connected to others: joined to Jesus Christ and to all other afflicted people whose center of gravity is also shifting outside themselves.”<sup>12</sup> I was encouraged that the Lord used these articles to help the participants grow in their understanding of biblical counseling.

The third strength was the purpose of the class. The class was meant to introduce someone new to the ideas of biblical counseling. The content was aimed at filling the mind with truth and using that truth to apply to one’s own life. Each lesson had a personal application question to connect the content of the lessons with the participants’ lives. This was important so that the participants would see that biblical counseling was relevant for all believers. The curriculum was simple but not simplistic. The ideas in the

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<sup>11</sup> The three articles that were most helpful were David Powlison, “How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt.1),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 49-66; Powlison, “How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 2),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (2013): 35-50; Powlison, “How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 3),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, no. 1 (2017): 9-32.

<sup>12</sup> Powlison, “How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 3),” 29.

curriculum provided a foundation for someone who might seek further training in biblical counseling.

The final strength was the support of the leadership and participants. The church was started in 2015, so still relatively new. The class helped build a culture of counseling instead of trying to change an established culture. The congregation saw that the elders and pastors supported the class. The elder team was excited for the impact it could have on the congregation. The leaders were eager to learn about biblical counseling and how they could change. There was little pushback on the content and many good questions that helped everyone think through their understanding more clearly. Many people talked about the class to others, and one commented on how everyone in the congregation could benefit by attending the class.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The project was successful in meeting the intended goals, but there were also some weaknesses. The first weakness was that there was not enough class time to go in depth with each topic. A lot of time was spent building a foundation for understanding the idea of biblical counseling. This did not allow enough time to connect the main ideas to practical counseling cases. It would have been helpful to use a couple real life scenarios to reinforce the content of the lessons. For example, it may have been helpful to discuss how to deal with a particular problem that people would identify with, such as anger. I asked them to think through their own lives and an area they wanted to change, but I did not have enough class time to go over that question. It may have been helpful to discuss those personal application questions with each individual to see if they were understanding how to apply the content to their own lives. I could have encouraged them to keep a journal of the answers to the personal application questions.

The second weakness was the number of topics that I could cover. I had to narrow the topics down to the most important ones for an introduction to biblical

counseling and realized there were a couple areas that would have been beneficial to cover. The role of prayer in counseling was brought up by a couple participants. Prayer is an important aspect of counseling that helps one pursue dependence on the Lord for change. This topic could have been further explained to show that prayer was not an option, but essential. Also, the role of the Holy Spirit in changing a person could have been explored at a deeper level. The Spirit was discussed from Galatians 5:16-26, but I think an entire lesson could have been helpful on how the Spirit changes believers. It is important to show the Spirit's role to change believers so that the focus is not on power within, but power that comes from the Spirit (Phil 2:13).

The final weakness was the participants' commitments. Many people were inconsistent due to busy schedules and other commitments. A few of the people had young children that they had to care for and were not able to make it each week. Others had work commitments in the evening and had to miss a couple lessons. This was also the first time a class was offered over consecutive weeks in the church. Most Bible studies were every other week or once a month. The commitment of eight consecutive weeks was difficult for most, although there were many who did not miss any lessons. I recorded the sessions on video and uploaded them to YouTube so that those who missed could catch up. Although, I felt that attending in person was a much better experience than video since one would miss the interaction with others. Also, there were a couple leaders who I thought would benefit from the class who did not complete the survey nor sign up for the class.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

Upon reflecting on the project there are two things I would do differently. First, I would want to be more intentional in recruiting leaders to the class and interacting with those that attended. There were two elders and a one deacon that I would like to have attended the class. I could have reached out to them earlier to see if they would

commit to attending. I would also like to have more follow-up with those who attended and identified those leaders that would have benefited from more training.

Second, I would have used a different space in the church to teach the lessons. I used our main sanctuary that could hold up to 150 people. The setup allowed people to sit in various areas that were far apart from each other. This made the discussion a little difficult, especially when someone asked a question from the very back of the room. I could have rearranged the room so that people were sitting closer together to make it more of an interactive setting. I also think using a whiteboard could have been helpful. Each person received a 35-page curriculum, but I think having a whiteboard for visualization could have been helpful.

### **Theological Reflections**

The primary theological focus of the project was on the centrality of the heart in biblical counseling. I wanted to emphasize the heart because it is an important foundation for understanding the change process. Four Scriptures were used to create this foundation: (1) Jesus taught that the heart is the source of behavior (Mark 7:14-23); (2) James taught that the heart directs behavior (Jas 4:1-4); (3) Paul taught the hope of the new heart (2 Cor 5:11-21); and (4) Paul taught about the war in the redeemed heart (Gal 5:16-25).

First, I emphasized that behavior is an expression of the condition of the heart. People are responsible and accountable because their behavior comes from inside of them, not outside. This focus on the heart was important to begin to understand the “why” behind behavior. The heart is not neutral but is always actively thinking, desiring, and choosing. This was helpful for the participants to understand that they were responsible and accountable for their actions and could not blame others.

Second, God taught us through James that the heart directs behavior. This helped inform their understanding that other people do not cause one to sin, but rather sin

comes from the inward conflict of desires. Thinking about desires makes one slow down and look inward before looking outward. Focusing on the heart helped the participants think about “why” they do things. I spent time discussing the motivations and desires of the heart which proved helpful in the participants examination of their own heart.

Third, Paul taught that believers have a new heart, and that there is a tension in the Christian’s life. Believers are dead to sin and now alive in Christ, yet believers will struggle with sin. There is a process of transformation that has begun and is not completed until believers get to heaven. The completion of sanctification helps remind believers that the goal is not perfection, but rather growing and changing into Christlikeness. This goal was one of the most important areas to discuss because many struggled with understanding how to deal with sin in sanctification. I think using the categories of indicatives and imperatives in this discussion were helpful in explaining the motivations for change.

Finally, Paul taught that there is a war in the redeemed heart. The picture helped the class understand why believers still struggle with sin. It is normal to sin, but this does not mean that one is given license to sin. Rather, this means that people still have remaining flesh that they must address in their lives. The ongoing work of sanctification helped participants think about their own struggle with sin and the need for ongoing change. The truth that everyone needs to change helps believers to humbly come alongside each other, instead of standing in judgment over each other.

The project’s focus on the centrality of the heart was important because it distinguishes biblical change from behavioral modification. The teaching on the heart gave the leaders a different lens and framework to think through human behavior. I used two lessons specifically to talk about the heart, in order to help the class understand how Scripture uses this term to help one understand behavior from a biblical perspective. This helped the class understand how to deal with sin and suffering by addressing their hearts, which is different than other secular methodologies of counseling. The goal was for them

to address sin and suffering in their own lives, so that they would care for one another.

### **Personal Reflections**

The project was helpful in my own understanding of biblical counseling. I first learned about biblical counseling in a counseling course I took at The Master's Seminary in 2007. I later audited other courses in counseling at The Master's University when my wife was working on her Master of Biblical Counseling. I never thought I would continue training in biblical counseling, but the Lord opened up the opportunity to study at Southern Seminary. This doctoral project has allowed me to read many books on new developments over the past decade. My initial training was primarily with the works of Jay Adams. I have benefited by reading many new authors, primarily through works from the Biblical Counseling Coalition and Christian Counseling for Education Foundation.

One of the reasons I focused on the heart in this project was that I had many conversations with believers at MABC who struggled with their sanctification. They either thought they had to be perfect, or they gave up and lived in sin. There was some wrestling with the tension in sanctification, but often there was confusion between the new creation and sanctification. This project allowed me to study the heart and build a stronger foundation in my mind on how to address sanctification in light of regeneration. This led me to focus on what Christ-centered change looks like, first for my life and then for others. I learned a lot by compiling all the research into a curriculum, and subsequently teaching through the material. I realized more areas in my life that I needed to grow and change. I believe that the more I learn about my heart, the more I see I need to change. This project helped me with a new framework and lens for thinking. I have not figured everything out, but I am reminded that my ultimate hope is found in Jesus and not in how far I progress in my sanctification.

The opportunity to teach in a classroom setting was also new to me. Most of my ministry opportunities have been preaching from the pulpit. I have not had the



opportunity to teach through a curriculum, which is different from preaching a sermon. I found the interaction challenged me to think about how to answer questions in a clear manner. I also enjoyed slowing down and walking through the curriculum. I really enjoyed this change of setting and seeing that I could be effective in a teaching role.

Finally, this project was a step of faith for me. I was unsure how many in the congregation would want to attend the course. I was surprised at how many leaders signed up for the class, along with the enthusiasm of those that attended. The senior pastor was supportive the entire project and encouraged me along the way. I am grateful that I did the project and look forward to how the Lord might use this in the future in the life of the church.

### **Conclusion**

This project was an important part of building a culture of one-another care in the body at Mount Ararat Bible Church. The content in the curriculum encouraged the leaders that Christ and the Scripture provide the resources needed to deal with the real difficulties and problems that believers face in this life, both sin and suffering. The course helped begin a change in the leaders' hearts toward a culture of humble and gentle care as the leaders recognized their own need for growth and change. The course also helped distinguish the great need of all believers to counsel one another.

There are many future opportunities to continue to strengthen biblical counseling at MABC. The project helped create a foundation that points people back to Christ and Scripture. God has been faithful from the beginning to the end of this project, and has again revealed his patience and kindness to a sinner still in need of daily grace. "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:20-21).

APPENDIX 1

COUNSELING ASSESSMENT

**Agreement to Participate**

The elders at Mount Ararat Bible Church desire all members to grow in “maturity in Christ” (Col 1:28). One of the areas the elders desire to see our Church grow is in the ability to counsel one another by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

The assessment you are about to complete is designed to identify the current understanding and perceptions of counseling. This research is being conducted by Roger Bayramian for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. If you decide to participate in the counseling training, you will be asked the same set of questions at the project’s conclusion. This will help determine the effectiveness of the training.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Section 1: Demographic Information

Name (or 4-digit code): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Section 2: General Questions

1. How long have you been a believer? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Write out your brief testimony

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3. How would you define counseling?

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4. Have you ever received formal counseling? If so, please describe.

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**Directions:** Please mark the appropriate answer. Some questions may ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- DS = disagree somewhat
- AS = agree somewhat
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

- |                                                                     |                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Counseling is only for people with big problems in life.         | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 2. Sin is the ultimate source of problems in my life.               | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 3. I often given biblical counsel to fellow believers.              | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 4. Believers should not struggle with sin.                          | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 5. Professional counseling provides the answers to life's problems. | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 6. The Bible has the answers to help me with sin and suffering.     | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 7. My heart is the source of my behavior.                           | SD D DS AS A SA |

- |                                                                                   |                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 8. The Bible provides sufficient answers to the difficulties in life.             | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 9. It is my responsibility to care and counsel my brothers and sisters in Christ. | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 10. I feel adequate to counsel other believers.                                   | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 11. Other people often make me angry.                                             | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 12. I believe it is important that the Church provides counseling.                | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 13. The primary source of difficulties in my life are other people.               | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 14. I struggle with a recurring sin that I have not overcome.                     | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 15. I believe I should be further along in my spiritual walk than I currently am. | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 16. I am confident that I provide helpful counsel to others.                      | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 17. Counseling should be left to licensed counselors.                             | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 18. Oftentimes other people cause me to sin.                                      | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 19. I know how to apply Scripture to the difficulties in my life.                 | SD D DS AS A SA |
| 20. I want to grow in my ability to counsel other believers.                      | SD D DS AS A SA |

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

<b>Biblical Counseling Curriculum: Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The Scriptures were properly interpreted.					
The material is faithful to the Bible’s teaching on the heart.					
The material is faithful to the Bible’s teaching on sin, sanctification, and suffering.					
The Scriptures were presented in a clear manner.					
The Scriptures were faithfully applied to counseling scenarios.					
The curriculum is helpful to someone new to biblical counseling.					

APPENDIX 3  
BIBLICAL COUNSELING VS OTHER MODELS

	<b>Biblical counseling</b>	<b>Other models</b>
<b>The Problem</b>	Sinner & Sufferer	Nature Nurture Mental Illness
<b>The Focus</b>	The Heart (i.e. thoughts, desires, motives)	Behavior, Symptoms, Cognition
<b>The Means</b>	Word of God	<i>DSM-5</i> , Theories, Observations
<b>The Methods</b>	Scripture, Faith in Christ, Holy Spirit	Therapy, Medication
<b>The Relationship between counselor/counselee</b>	Christian brother/sister, Fellow saint, sinner, sufferer	Professional service
<b>The Goals</b>	Christlikeness, Knowing Christ more, Love God and neighbor	Mental health, symptom relief, change in behavior, improved version of themselves

APPENDIX 4  
MOTIVES OF THE HEART

<i><b>Motives</b></i>	<i><b>Scripture</b></i>	<i><b>Examples</b></i>
<b>Ruling desires, demands, sinful wants, pleasures, passions, cravings, lusts, expectations, needs</b>	<i>Exod 20:17; Rom 1:24-27; Gal 5:16-17; Eph 2:3, 4:22; Jas 1:13-15; 4:1-3; 1 Pet 2:11; 4:2, 1 John 2:16-18</i>	<i>I want, I demand, I must have, I need, I can't live without, I will not be satisfied unless, I deserve, I am entitled</i>
<b>False gods, idols</b>	<i>Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 10:1-14; Eph 5:5, Phil 3:19; 1 John 5:21</i>	<i>Fear of man, acceptance, approval, success, power, control, comfort, convenience, tranquility, ease, money, possessions, sensual pleasure</i>
<b>Masters, rulers, what we serve or obey</b>	<i>Gen 4:6-7; Ps 119:133; Matt 6:24; Rom 6:15-23</i>	<i>Money, sinful pleasure, security</i>
<b>Treasures, riches</b>	<i>Matt 6:19-21; 13:44-46, Ps 119:72, 127; 1 Tim 6:9-10, 19</i>	<i>Earthly wealth, fame, power, success</i>
<b>Good or bad trees with good or bad fruit</b>	<i>Matt 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-45</i>	<i>Fig trees to do grow from an apple tree</i>
<b>What/whom we serve</b>	<i>John 21:15-27; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 1 John 2:15</i>	<i>God or man, creator or creation, self or Jesus</i>
<b>Expectations; in what we/whom we hope</b>	<i>Luke 24:17-21; 1 Tim 6:17; Heb 6:18-20, 1 Pet 1:13</i>	<i>Career, marriage, children, success, education, performance, maturity, knowledge, personal perfection, comfort, ease, pleasure</i>

<b>In what/whom we trust or depend</b>	<i>Jer 17:5-8; Ps 20:7; Prov 3:5</i>	<i>Wealth, people, education, circumstances, strength</i>
<b>What/whom we fear</b>	<i>Eccl 12:13; Matt 10:28, 1 Pet 3:13-15</i>	<i>God or man</i>
<b>Foundations; on what we build our life on<sup>1</sup></b>	<i>Matt 7:24-27; 1 Tim 6:17-19; Heb 12:27-28</i>	<i>Temporary things on earth</i>

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<sup>1</sup> The content from the first two columns of this chart came from Robert Jones, “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” (lecture notes, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, Summer 2019), 14-19. I created the third column of examples.



APPENDIX 5

THE DYNAMIC HEART IN RELATIONSHIP

The Dynamic Heart in Relationship

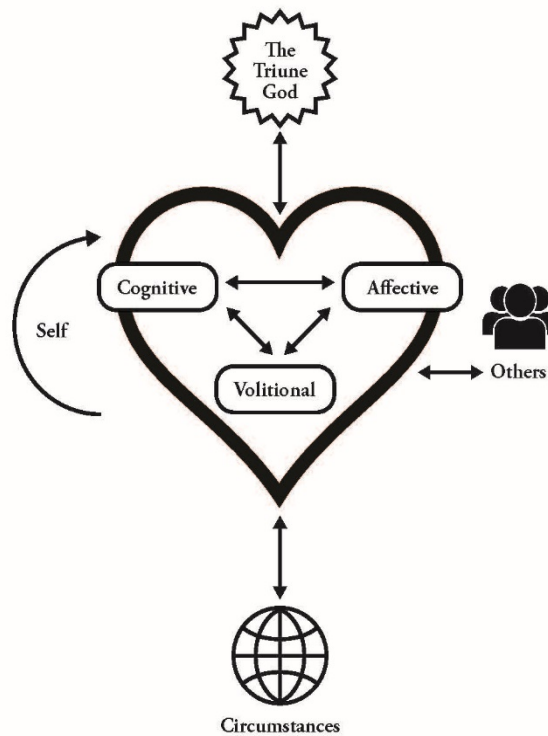


Figure A1. The dynamic heart in relationship<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Image used with permission from New Growth Press and can be found in Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 103.

APPENDIX 6  
THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHRIST-  
CENTERED CHANGE

The following outline provides the main points and subpoints for the eight-week class on The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change. The goal presented for Christ-centered change was a life-long growing and changing to reflect Christlikeness in our beliefs, thoughts, motives, desires, words, emotions, and actions through an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. The following eight-lessons were taught at MABC:

1. Introduction - What is biblical counseling? (Rom 15:15; Eph 4:15)
  - a. Distinctives of biblical counseling
  - b. Differences between biblical counseling and other models of counseling
  - c. Fundamentals of Christ-centered change
    - i. The necessity of Christ-centered change (Mark 7:14-23; Rom 6:6, 12-14; 1 John 1:8)
    - ii. The path to Christ-centered change
    - iii. The goal of Christ-centered change
2. The Bible and Counseling - Does Scripture address the real problems of life? (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3)
  - a. The unique nature of the Bible (Ps 19:7-14, 119:60; Prov 30:5; John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3)
  - b. The sufficiency of the Bible for biblical counseling
  - c. The sufficiency of the Bible helps us understand ourselves (Heb 4:12)
    - i. How does Scripture describe the motives of our hearts?
    - ii. Scripture defines the goal for counseling (2 Pet 2:18)
3. The Centrality of the Heart (Pt 1) – Why do I do the things I do? (Prov 4:23, 20:5)
  - a. What is the cause behind our behavior?
  - b. What do we mean by the term heart?
  - c. The heart is the source of behavior (Mark 7:14-23)
  - d. The heart directs behavior (Jam 4:1-4)
    - i. How do the desires of our hearts direct our lives?
    - ii. When is desire sinful?
    - iii. Desires function best when submitted to God (2 Cor 5:9)
4. The Centrality of the Heart (Pt 2) – Why do I struggle with sin? (2 Cor 3:18; Phil 1:6)
  - a. The Bible teaches the hope of a new heart (2 Cor 5:11-21)
  - b. The Bible explains why believers struggle with sin (Gal 5:16-25)
  - c. The Centrality of the heart and living in tension

5. The Gospel and Sin – How do the truths of the gospel help us deal with remaining sin? (Rom 8:1; 1 John 1:9, 2:1)
  - a. The Reality of Sin (Gen 3, 6:5; Rom 5:12; Gal 5:16-25)
  - b. The Plan of Redemption (Gen 3:15)
  - c. The Reality of Remaining Sin
  - d. The Application of the Gospel to Remaining Sin
    - i. Indicatives vs imperatives
    - ii. How do the implications of the gospel help us to deal with remaining sin?
6. The Gospel and Suffering – How does the gospel address suffering? (2 Cor 1:3-7, 4:17)
  - a. Suffering in the Bible
    - i. The first sufferers (Gen 3:8-19)
    - ii. The innocent sufferer (Gen 4:1-16)
    - iii. The most well-known sufferer (Job)
    - iv. The sufferer with no direct cause (John 9:1-34)
    - v. The suffering Savior (Isa 53)
  - b. How do the implications of the gospel help us to deal with suffering? (1 Pet 2:22; Heb 4:14-16)
  - c. How does suffering change us?
7. The Priority of Addressing the Heart – How does my heart change? (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:1-4)
  - a. Cautions when addressing the heart
  - b. Addressing the Dynamic Heart (Num 20:1-5)
  - c. Important to remember
8. Counseling One-Another – How do I help others change? (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:15-16; Col 3:16)
  - a. How should we view relationships in the local body? (Prov 17:9-10; 1 Thess 5:14; Jam 4:1-4; 1 Pet 4:8)
  - b. How do we counsel one another in the body? (1 Cor 13:4-7; Col 3:12-14)
    - i. Who is qualified to help?
    - ii. How do I help?

APPENDIX 7  
GROWTH IN GOD'S GRACE AND  
REMAINING SIN

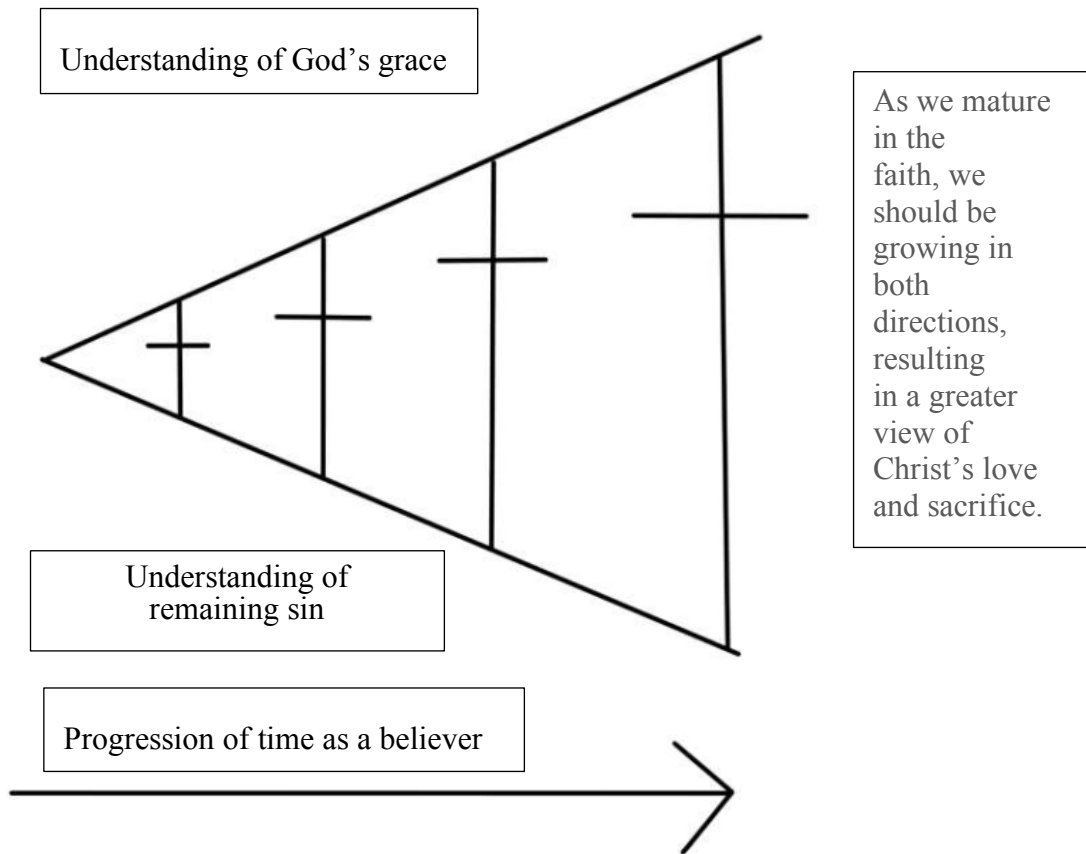


Figure A2. Growth in God's grace and remaining sin

APPENDIX 8  
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A1. *T*-test: Paired two sample for means

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	90.27272727	95.77272727
Variance	95.16017316	60.46969697
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.707070663	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t Stat	-3.709742055	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000648861	
T Critical one-tail	1.720742903	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001297721	
t Critical two-tail	2.079613845	

APPENDIX 9  
COUNSELING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Table A2. Pre- and post-counseling assessment results

Participants	Pre-project CA	Post-project CA
1	74	83
2	86	101
3	78	88
4	92	101
5	110	99
6	96	98
7	94	110
8	88	100
9	102	98
10	80	81
11	92	93
12	98	105
13	82	92
14	98	105
15	87	93
16	77	95
17	99	99
18	90	97
19	86	91
20	88	91
21	108	105
22	81	82
Average	90	96

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## ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCING LEADERS TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING AT MOUNT ARARAT BIBLE CHURCH IN NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stuart W. Scott

This project seeks to introduce leaders to biblical counseling at Mount Ararat Bible Church (MABC) in Northridge, California. Chapter 1 describes the ministry context of MABC and the goals of the project. Chapter 2 establishes the centrality of the heart in biblical counseling through four passages of Scripture (Mark 7:14-23; Jas 4:1-4; 2 Cor 5:11-21; Gal 5:16-25). Chapter 3 examines the priority of addressing the heart in biblical counseling by focusing on the priority of the sufficiency of Scripture, community, and the implications of the gospel to sin and suffering. Chapter 4 describes the 8-week curriculum called “The Fundamentals of Christ-Centered Change.” Chapter 5 examines the effectiveness of the curriculum. The overall focus of the project was to introduce biblical counseling to those unfamiliar with it, so they can understand that God’s Word provides help and hope to the sin and suffering that all people face in life.

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