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INTRODUCING BIBLICAL COUNSELING AT
TOWALIGA BAPTIST CHURCH IN
JACKSON, GEORGIA

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INTRODUCING BIBLICAL COUNSELING AT
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JACKSON, GEORGIA

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To my wife, Marsha Sanders,
for her loving and faithful support to me, our two children, and our church

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PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without my wife, Marsha. Her continued support for me and love for our church has been a guiding influence. I am forever thankful to God for her. I am also indebted to Dr. Stuart Scott for the countless hours he spent assisting me in this project. The value of his wisdom and direction is more than words can describe.

I am also indebted to the people of Towaliga Baptist Church. This project exists because of my great love for them. They care deeply about the glory of God and the good of their neighbor. It is my hope that this project will help them continue in those passions.

Finally, I am thankful for the faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their encouragement and guidance have made me a better pastor, writer, and counselor. It is my hope that the blessings they have bestowed upon me will pour out to my family and the people of Towaliga Baptist Church.

Jason Sanders

Jackson, Georgia

December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of Towaliga Baptist Church states that it exists to “glorify Jesus Christ through gospel-proclamation and disciple-making.” For nearly a decade this mission statement has been put into practice by strong biblical teaching and service. Expository preaching is a bedrock of Towaliga, and the major element of three weekly services. This verse-by-verse approach is also demonstrated in weekly Sunday School classes at Towaliga. Although Towaliga is located in a small, rural area, the opportunities for service are numerous. Members of the church seek to serve the community by crossing racial and economic barriers to build intentional, gospel-focused relationships with those in need. As a result of these ministries, the people of Towaliga Baptist Church continually serve the unchurched in the community. Towaliga’s attempts to meet needs in the community have brought many people and their needs into the church. As a result, there is a great demand for biblical counseling not only among the members of Towaliga, but also among those they have brought into the church.

Service is the primary means by which Towaliga ministers to the community, the first step in engaging the surrounding culture. In the context of the Towaliga Baptist Church community, service is best defined as the intentional assistance of others by meeting their needs for the specific aim of glorifying Jesus Christ. Whereas service allows the church to address a broken-down car, biblical counseling allows the church to address the broken-down heart. The quantity of needs for biblical counseling exceeds what the pastoral staff can address. Thus, the people of Towaliga Baptist Church must be equipped to counsel biblically. They must know that the people they have reached through addressing physical needs also have heart needs. Through this project, the people of

Towaliga will be educated, motivated, and equipped to confidently offer biblical counsel to those in need of soul care.

Context

Towaliga Baptist Church has been in existence since 1825. It is located outside of the city limits of Jackson, Georgia, a rural town just under an hour south of Atlanta. The southward growth of Atlanta was just beginning to reach Jackson in 2008, when the real estate market took a downward turn, devastating the local economy. For several years, entire neighborhoods that were built to accommodate that growth sat empty. The city is now in the early stages of an economic recovery that promises to bring drastic change.

With that change, Towaliga Baptist Church has experienced measured growth. Regular attendance at a Sunday morning worship service was just under 100 in 2009. Now the average attendance is 230. Much of that growth is from younger families who are not native to the area. The church currently sits at a crossroads. Many older members are pleased with the growth and have graciously parted with the traditions they have cherished to continue reaching new people. Even for the oldest, most traditional members, the Bible, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandment take precedent over bylaws and traditions. Their submission to the Bible as God's authoritative Word fuels their belief in biblical counseling. Towaliga has a passion to see lives changed through biblical counseling, but the congregation currently lacks the vision and confidence to be the agents of that change. In their minds, biblical counseling is to be done exclusively by paid pastoral staff.

Biblical Counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church

Biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church is a relatively new concept. In the past, a pastor would talk to someone in need on occasion, but, as the issue grew more complex, the pastor would refer the counselee to an outside source. In many cases, these outside sources, while carrying the name "Christian," would be far from biblical. At best,

most pastoral counseling was limited to trying to help members get along with each other. The church had little to no influence over the care of souls struggling with addiction, depression, and abuse.

Over the past decade, Towaliga saw a shift in its counseling model as more people became aware of the availability of pastoral counseling to members as well as non-members. This shift was most noticeable among the number of couples seeking pre-marital and marital counseling who began to rely on the church rather than an outside source. Over time, individuals suffering from anxiety and addiction who would otherwise find a psychology-based program at another church in a larger area began to seek help from a church in their own community. This approach played a significant role in the numerical growth at Towaliga.

To accommodate the growing number of marriages and families in crisis in the area, Towaliga began to offer regular marriage and family classes. While these classes were not one-on-one sessions, they were deeply rooted in biblical counseling. The church used Paul Tripp's video resources for parents and married couples. While serving the families of Towaliga, these sessions also helped create an environment in the church where members could talk freely about their struggles with marriage and family. In a small, rural town where people are friendly but like to remain private, this indicated a significant step.

Over time, as word spread about the church's resources and the availability of pastoral counseling, more people began to seek counseling from Towaliga. This knowledge has led to substantial growth and awareness of the needs of others. However, if the church and surrounding community are to continue to benefit from biblical counseling, significant structural changes are needed. Without these changes, biblical counseling will degenerate into a system of referral.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The members of Towaliga Baptist Church have a high view of the Bible. They affirm its truth and many have experienced its power to bring real and lasting change.

This belief in the authority of Scripture, mixed with their skepticism of many outside resources, especially relating to matters of the mind and heart, creates a natural openness to the concept of biblical counseling.

Another strength of the biblical counseling ministry at Towaliga Baptist Church is the system of discipleship in place for those who have completed biblical counseling. When the pastoral staff counsels someone, a system is in place for the counselee to continue in their growth and healing. Sunday School is that system.

While the Sunday School approach may not be cutting edge, it is still an effective means of discipleship at Towaliga. The entire church uses the same, Bible-centered curriculum and the teachers administering that curriculum are strong and faithful. Training these teachers as lay biblical counselors is the focus of this project.

While devotion to Scripture and dedicated teachers are Towaliga's strengths, weaknesses do exist. Typically, in small, rural areas in the south, the senior pastor is highly respected. Consequently, many older Christians in such areas greatly revere the senior pastor. They may not always like him or agree with him, but they are quicker to turn to him for soul care than they are to an outsider. This following leads to one of the great obstacles of sustained, multi-generational biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church: almost all biblical counseling responsibilities fall on the senior pastor. In addition, in large part, the church members do not recognize this as a problem. That is, after all, a part of his remunerated responsibilities. Along with the reverence for the position of senior pastor in a rural community comes an expectation that he will do a majority of the work that should be done by members. This deficiency can be best addressed by teaching Ephesians 4:11-16 to the congregation. Training members how to counsel biblically is not done merely to lighten the load for the pastor. It is a fulfillment of God's design for his church.

At Towaliga, there is no buffer around the pastor. If someone needs counseling, they contact him directly. When follow-up is needed, it is up to the pastor to navigate through it. If the presence of another mature believer would be beneficial in a counseling

session, it is unlikely to happen. It should be noted that this is not because the members of Towaliga are entitled or lazy; rather, many of them are the product of a church culture where soul care is left to the professionals. The average member of Towaliga would feel as though it is not his or her place to counsel others, and that this sort of work is strictly for pastors and other professionals. The pastor and teachers at Towaliga must continually put Romans 15:14 and other key “one another” passages before the congregation to help them see a more biblical approach to the ministry of counseling.

There are three important elements to the burgeoning biblical counseling ministry at Towaliga Baptist Church. First, proper training is crucial. As leadership began to cast a vision for biblical counseling before the congregation, it was assumed that many members would be interested in being a part of this ministry. The people of Towaliga Baptist Church are eager to minister. The success of this ministry is rooted in the engagement between willingness to counsel and training in how to counsel.

Second, once people are trained and the ministry begins to flourish, organization is vital. It is important to have a system that allows the biblical counseling ministry to run efficiently. Otherwise, the church will be left with several willing and trained counselors who have no idea what to do next. Training Sunday School teachers to counsel biblically is the most efficient way to keep this ministry organized.

Finally, each biblical counselor at Towaliga needed to operate in accountability to the leadership of the church. These checks and balances helped to prevent counselors from giving unbiblical advice or behaving in unbiblical ways as well as mitigate potential accusations. This system of accountability is aided by proper training and organization as well as the fact that Sunday School teachers have already been vetted by church leadership.

Rationale

Towaliga Baptist Church is a growing congregation in a small community. Few resources are available in the community for those in need of counseling. Many seek help in larger cities from sources that are less than biblical. Over the past few years, this has

changed as more people have found help at Towaliga. Those who have benefited from such counseling have told other friends who are in need. As a result, Towaliga was under-equipped to meet the counseling needs of the community.

At the start of the project, I was the only biblical counselor at Towaliga. On a weekly basis, I averaged around four counseling sessions, many of which involved those seeking counseling for the first time. This was not a sustainable model for me or the counseling ministry at Towaliga. If there was no change, then I would have either burned out or those with unmet needs would have returned to their less-than-biblical sources to find help. To better love the community and the church, a specific model of biblical counseling at Towaliga was needed.

The congregation at Towaliga is eager to help those in need. They have a reputation throughout the community for moving toward hurting people. The biblical counseling ministry at Towaliga was not under-equipped because the people are lazy or apathetic. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The biblical counseling ministry was under-equipped because the people have done such a fine job of directing the hurting to the church. The great need was not for a renewed heart for ministry among the people but rather a shared vision from the leadership. This shared vision led to a shared leadership that both strengthened the church and served the community.

In many areas, the people of Towaliga have put forth a strong effort to reach the community. However, some attention had to be paid to equipping the saints at Towaliga. Despite best attentions, it is neither biblical nor practically beneficial for Christians to engage in ministry without at least attempting to be equipped for that ministry. An important aspect of the shared vision of biblical counseling focused on equipping members.

Ultimately, preparing the people of Towaliga for ministry transpired through preaching. A six-week sermon series focused on both the priesthood of all believers as well as the power of God's Word to bring change to hurting people. Each sermon focused

on a specific need, such as anxiety or depression, and how God has spoken to those needs through his Word. He has ordained all his people, not just professional ministers, be agents of grace and mercy to those who are suffering. The purpose of these sermons was to open people's eyes, not just to the needs around them, but to the power God has given them to bring help to those in need. This sermon series went beyond mere information; the congregation was encouraged to bear witness by speaking the truth in love to those whom God has put before them. Even for believers who are new to biblical counseling, this can be done in private, one-on-one conversations.

Shared leadership was an expected result of this shared vision. If the congregation gathered from this sermon series only that the Bible has power to help others, then the mission was a failure. Rather, the desire was that members of the congregation would see that God has given them the resources to help those in need of change. While the pastor and other staff members will always play a role in biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church, an expected result of this shared vision was that members of the congregation would step into roles of servanthood and leadership in the biblical counseling ministry. Sharing these responsibilities would lead to a healthier church that creates more disciples through biblical counseling.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to introduce biblical counseling to the members of Towaliga Baptist Church by training them in biblical counseling and creating an atmosphere where they can put the training into practice for the good of the church and surrounding community.

Goals

Restructuring Towaliga Baptist Church to make it more suitable for healthy, sustained biblical counseling is not an expeditious task. The process requires constant

communication and prayerful leadership. However, the initial benefits of this change were realized as the following goals were achieved:

1. The first goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on biblical counseling.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum related to the basics of biblical counseling.
3. The third goal was to begin to equip leaders to biblically counsel.

The success and measurement of these goals are described in the research methodology.¹

Research Methodology

The first goal was to develop a six-week sermon series on biblical counseling. The topics covered were the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling, every believer's power to counsel biblically, love as the motive of biblical counseling, how the Bible addresses anxiety, how the Bible addresses depression and how the Bible speaks to those in broken marriages. A common theme throughout the sermon series was the roles of the pastor and congregation in personal ministry as described in Ephesians 4:11-16. The goal was measured by the deacons of Towaliga Baptist Church who employed a rubric² to thoroughly examine the sermons for biblical accuracy, clarity, and relevance as well as the delivery of the sermons. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric indicators received a score of exemplary. If the benchmark was not met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum related to the basics of biblical counseling.³ The topics covered were the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling, every believer's power to counsel biblically, love as the motive of biblical counseling,

¹ 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.

² See appendix 1.

³ See appendix 2.

how to counsel people who suffer from anxiety, how to counsel those who are depressed, and how to provide marriage counseling. The goal was measured by an expert panel who used a rubric⁴ to evaluate the scope, teaching methods, and applicability of the material that is being taught by the pastor. The 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, then the material was revised until it met the standard. An advisor and second reader pointed out that the initial expert panel selected was not adequate. The expert panel used in this project was selected as a result of their feedback.

The third goal was to equip leaders to biblically counsel. The newly developed curriculum was used in the equipping process. The goal was determined to be successfully achieved when the *t*-test for dependent samples showed a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-evaluation survey scores. Measurement was achieved by administering a pre- and post-survey⁵ that demonstrated participants' level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to counsel biblically.⁶ While many attended the class, only thirty select individuals were given the pre- and post-evaluation survey. Additionally, opportunities were given to observe biblical counseling sessions to reveal their level of competency. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test⁷ for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores. Neil Salkind describes a *t*-test as “a comparison of means from each group of scores and focuses on the difference between the scores.”⁸ Also, this goal was

⁴ See appendix 3.

⁵ See appendix 4.

⁶ See appendix 5.

⁷ See Appendix 6.

⁸ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 191.

successfully met when there was a significant difference between each person's pre- and post-evaluation survey results. Participants were encouraged to attend all six sessions. If a student was absent, provisions were made to ensure that the student was taught the missed material. While focused primarily on church leaders, these sessions were also open to those who showed an interest in biblical counseling and an openness to learn the concepts. When all sessions were completed, participants were encouraged to continue their learning by beginning the training process with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors and by observing counseling sessions when appropriate.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Throughout this project, the term *biblical counseling* is used. For the sake of clarity, a definition is provided.

Biblical counseling. Paul Tripp uses Ephesians 4:15 to define biblical counseling as “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into . . . Christ.”⁹ While the focus of *Christian counseling* is often on biblical principles, *biblical counseling* is rooted in the biblical text. From these principles, the biblical counselor addresses a disordered heart while other counselors, even some who are Christian, seek only to address a disordered mind.¹⁰

Three delimitations applied to this project. First, participants in the training process were limited to church leaders, Sunday School teachers, and other interested individuals. Second, the scope of the training was a six-week curriculum focused upon equipping these members to counsel biblically. Finally, the timeframe for the project was

⁹ Paul D. Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 332.

¹⁰ The role of the Spirit and love in biblical counseling as well as the differences between biblical counseling and all other forms of counseling are developed more thoroughly in the writings of Jay Adams. This definition and explanation has its roots in Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

limited to a six-week sermon series and a six-week teaching series at a time that fit the schedule of as many people as possible.

Conclusion

The people of Towaliga Baptist Church have a high view of Scripture and a strong desire to minister to those in need. The remainder of this work demonstrates how servants and leaders in the church were trained to combine those two attributes in order to counsel biblically. Chapter 2 highlights why the Bible can be trusted as the primary resource in counseling. Chapter 3 focuses on how the Bible was used in equipping biblical counselors from within the church body. Considerable attention is given to the priesthood of believers as well as the spirit of power, and love, and self-control that God has given to believers in Christ (2 Tim 2:7).

CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDATION FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The aim of this project is to develop a church-wide system of biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church that strengthens the church and serves the community. As noted in chapter 1, Towaliga is a traditional Southern Baptist Church. There is a lot of good that comes with such a categorization. For one, there is a high regard for the Bible among the congregation. However, one of Towaliga's shortcomings as a traditional, rural congregation is that it fails to realize that authentic, life-changing ministry can flow from its members, not from just the senior pastor and church leadership.

Four biblical texts will be examined in this chapter to highlight how the power of God is revealed both through his Word and his people, both in preaching and in biblical counseling settings. These passages combine to demonstrate Kellemen and Tautges' view that "the public and the private ministry of the Word provide the skeletal structure and muscular system of biblical discipleship, respectively."¹ Second Timothy 3:1-4:5 details the power of the Bible to change lives, even in a changing culture that is growing more and more hostile to the things of God. This passage was chosen because, although Paul is aware of the culture's growing hostility to biblical truth, he remains clear in his command for Timothy to use the scriptures. Matthew 15:1-20 explains what separates biblical counseling from all other forms of care. Finally, Ephesians 4:11-16 and Romans 15:14 reveal that all of God's people, to some degree, are equipped to minister to others. Although these passages vary in author, style, and targeted audience, they unite

¹ Bob Kellemen, Kevin Carson, and Paul Tautges, *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care Through God's People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 73.

for a central purpose. Drane tells that that purpose is to “claim that the story of Jesus is the grand metanarrative of all history—the one big story that gives meaning and significance to all the small stories of everyday human experience and insight.”² In pointing primarily to Jesus, these passages also direct attention to one’s own heart.

The Bible as the Basis for Biblical Counseling (2 Tim 3:1-4:4)

Biblical counseling, as the name implies, is rooted in Scripture. The difference from most forms of counseling is obvious. While some counselors who operate from outside of the Christian worldview tend to focus primarily on the mind from a purely scientific foundation, biblical counseling finds its roots in the very words of God and approaches each individual in need of care with the understanding that he has been created in the image of God and is living in a fallen world. The differences between biblical counseling and Christian counseling are often not as obvious because both use similar language and references. However, while some Christian counseling is rooted in a Christian ethic, not all forms are based in Scripture, at least not to the degree that biblical counseling is.

Much time has passed since Paul wrote his letter to Timothy but there are still many similarities between the ancient and modern world. Indeed, this passage is best understood as a prophecy of sorts that has already come to pass. The “times of difficulty” (3:1) have come. Christians do not look ahead to a time “when people will not endure sound teaching” (4:3). However, for Christians, it is the source of the Word, not the culture, where relevance is found. Because the Bible is the very word of God, it is always relevant and efficient. Along with emphasizing the power and authority of Scripture, Paul’s words to Timothy serve to encourage modern ministers to remain faithful in the ministry of the Word because their primary tool is always relevant. Lambert states, “The

² John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 12.

Bible is as relevant to show us how to fight worry as it is to chart the path forward in any other difficulty.”³

The Days Are Difficult (2 Tim 3:1-9)

It can be easy for Christians to misunderstand the Bible when it speaks of the last days. For some, the mind and imagination are quickly drawn to the second coming of Christ and the more dramatic moments of which the Bible speaks that will usher in that event for which all Christians await. A more biblically faithful approach to the last days is to understand them as the era between Christ’s ascension and his return. Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin say as much regarding the last days: “In the New Testament the phrase refers to that entire time from the completion of Christ’s redemptive work until his return. Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension have inaugurated the last days.”⁴

So, Christians do not wait for times of difficulty to arrive. They are already here, and it is of utmost importance that the people of God are equipped for them as those times grow increasingly more difficult. With each passing difficult day, the overall health of the church grows in importance. Andreas Köstenberger writes, “Eschatology takes center stage and casts its shadow on ecclesiology, with the effect of throwing the need for the life of faith, the pursuit of virtue, and faithful gospel ministry into even sharper focus.”⁵

The difficult days that Paul describes in this passage should not be understood simply as events in the future but rather the present. Paul mentions greed, selfishness, pride, the breakdown of the family, and hedonism. Such sins were around in Paul’s day,

³ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 299.

⁴ Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), chap. 4, eBook.

⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 260.

are obviously still around today, and will remain until Christ's return. This is why Paul's assessment of the fallen culture in 3:1-9, his description of the Bible as God breathed in 3:10-17, and his command in 4:1-8 for Timothy to use the Word in his ministry are all linked and all relate directly to biblical counseling today. A fallen world does not need fallen wisdom—it needs biblical truth. No text can speak to the root causes as well as the brutal consequences of pride, selfishness, and greed like the Bible can. While it is important for Christians to be aware of their culture, the human condition, and how to respond to evil and suffering, it is crucial that the wisdom of God's Word be the primary guide. Christians must be familiar with the Scriptures before they can ever truly understand the times and thus the human heart. Spurgeon recognized the wonderful gift that believers have before them in the Word of God and he preached earnestly against any false sense of humility that might prevent a deep reliance and feasting upon God's word: "Ah, dear hearts! If we had not more than we deserved, we should not even be alive in the land of mercy. Everything that God gives is of grace, not of merit, not of desert; therefore, unworthy thought thou be, take it."⁶

This scriptural approach does not mean that everyone that Christians will encounter will be changed for the better and come to faith and repentance. Paul's advice to "avoid such people" (2 Tim 3:5) who live opposed to God's decrees is a reminder that change is ultimately up to the Holy Spirit, not human effort. However, the church must not take his word as a command to avoid sinful people, otherwise how would evangelism take place and how could Christians be "kind to everyone" (2:24)? Rather, it must be understood that there are and will be some people who have reached such a state of continued rebellion that what Lea and Griffin refer to as a "separation in spirit"⁷ will be necessary.

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1987), 499.

⁷ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, chap 4.

The Biblical Counselor's Example (2 Tim 3:10-15)

The work of biblical counseling is not confined to a specific session where individuals chronicle their suffering. The counselor's life, as well as the biblical guidance and wisdom that he imparts to others, can also serve as a source of hope and guidance to others. Whatever good can be said of Timothy, it is important to note the role that other people played in his development. He learned from his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5) and he received much guidance from his mentor, Paul, who encouraged him to live in a spirit of power, love, and self-control rather than fear (2 Tim 1:7). It is not that Timothy needed to learn that the Bible he used was God's Word. Paul, as John Polhill notes,

was most concerned to challenge Timothy with the Scripture's *usefulness*. . . . Timothy knew the word of God. He had learned the Scriptures at his mother's knee (v.15). Paul had in mind the Old Testament, which Timothy had learned from his pious Jewish mother and grandmother; the New Testament did not yet exist as a canon of Scripture. Everything he said about Scripture, however, is certainly applicable to the totality of God's Word, both old and new covenants.⁸

The impact of these three saints on Timothy serves as a profound reminder of the power of God's Word in establishing a kingdom-focused legacy. Gordon Fee expresses the importance of Paul's example in Timothy's life: "But the concern here is for Timothy to reflect them as well, especially in light of the twin realities of the false teachers and the inevitable suffering he is called upon to share."⁹ Timothy needed someone in flesh and blood who could serve as his example and Timothy needed to follow that example, not just observe it. By God's providence, Paul would be just the man Timothy needed. Paul's example to Timothy also serves modern readers by emphasizing the importance of belief and practice matching.

⁸ John B. Polhill, *Paul & His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Hollman, 1999), 435.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Nashville: Baker, 1988), 276.

Biblical counseling is more than simply reciting a few verses to someone in a tight spot; biblical counseling is speaking the truth of God’s Word and giving authentic, authoritative examples of how God has proved his faithfulness throughout history. When Paul tells Timothy to look to his teachings, sufferings, and aim in life he is not drawing attention to himself but rather to the God who remained faithful. The word that Paul uses for “follows” in verse 10 is *parēkolouthēsas* and denotes a following that is both in location and doctrinal belief. Rather than building a platform, Paul was concerned with building Timothy, and thus Christ’s church. Biblical counselors are dispensers of God’s wisdom. Their guidance is often drastically different from the advice, strategies, and promises of the world. The truth dispensed from faithful biblical counselors is rooted in the Bible, which is from the mouth of God and is sufficient to change lives. With this in mind, it is important that any believer serving as an example to others does so out of a deep love for God and neighbor, not what John Stott calls a “pious cloak of self-love.”¹⁰

The Biblical Counselor’s Wealth of Resources (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Opposition to biblical counseling sometimes comes from within the church. These critiques are not always without reason and no movement or method of man is above honest critiques. However, all Christians, regardless of their stance on biblical counseling, should find agreement on the authority, reliability, and sufficiency of God’s Word. If it is important enough to be preached on a Sunday morning, why then could the Bible not be used to guide a veteran struggling through PTSD or a teenager with an eating disorder? If the Bible is good for eternal, invisible matters, why then can it not be good for the present day, internal concerns with which people struggle? Paul understood the Word to be sufficient for every day of the week, not just the preaching hour of the Lord’s day.

¹⁰ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978), 135.

The Bible is profitable because it comes from the very mouth of God—the only being who has never spoken a wasted or misused word. However, what is it profitable for? Certainly, for salvation, but the benefits do not stop there. The Bible is profitable for teaching. Again, the question must be asked, if the Word of God is sufficient to be taught from a pulpit, why would it be insufficient for a counseling session? The answer according to Paul is that it is good for both. Kelly notes the impact of God’s Word on the man of God: “With the help of a sound Christian training he becomes perfectly adapted to his task and can face his responsibilities squarely.”¹¹ Sound Christian training is impossible apart from the Word of God. It is needed by both the counselor and the counselee.

The Bible is profitable also for reproof and correction. Like no other book, the Bible has a way of exposing sins that tend to go unnoticed or ignored. It can be tempting to avoid addressing sin in counseling sessions or to mention it only in regard to the sins committed against the counselee. The Bible is sufficient and profitable for addressing both the sins committed *against* Christians and those committed *by* Christians, but this is where biblical counselors must be cautious.

Biblical counselors must faithfully address sin, but they must do so in a way that does not amount to always blaming or adding extra shame to the person being counseled. To be fair, sometimes that blame is needed, but in addressing sin, the counselor needs wisdom to diagnose each specific case, remembering that no two individual personalities or situations are alike, and each case must be handled with care as well as biblical faithfulness.

Biblical counselors have a reputation for sometimes oversimplifying every case to a need to trust Jesus more and repent of heart-level idolatry while ignoring other factors. This reputation, while not always true, is in some cases well deserved. In using the Bible to reprove and correct, counselors must do so with a spirit of compassion and

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *I & II Timothy Titus*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1963), 204.

discernment. Sure, the victim of sexual abuse can and does sin and that sin must be addressed. However, things like timing, empathy, and discernment come into play in this situation. If offering care, hope, and training in righteousness are to take place, then compassion must be primary, otherwise the counselor just might be training in self-righteousness or even shame.

The Biblical Counselor's Confidence (2 Tim 4:1-4)

The impact of this passage is best felt when read backwards. As a result, one sees Paul “demystify the movement”¹² of heresy that had found its way in the young church. The importance of the Christian minister’s job in preaching the gospel becomes evident here. Köstenberger refers to this section as “the emotional climax of the entire letter.”¹³ In verses 3 and 4, Paul explains how the time is coming when people will turn away from the truth of the Bible and embrace doctrines that make them feel good. That time, much like the last days of which Paul spoke, has arrived. From a more humanistic perspective, it might make sense to abandon the preaching of the Word that Paul commands. “Why stick with something that people are abandoning and instead use something not so countercultural?,” one might ask.

Paul does the opposite. Along with telling his young understudy about the coming opposition to the teaching of the Word, he tells him to teach the Word. Preach it all the time. Teach it. Use it to correct others. Use it as the standard of living and guiding others to live. Polhill notes, “The expression ‘in season’ may derive from the Greek philosophers, who insisted on finding just the right time for sharing their teaching in order to make the greatest impact. Paul insisted that the luxury of waiting for the

¹² Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 287.

¹³ Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 271.

opportune moment no longer existed.”¹⁴ The naysayers did not impact Paul’s confidence. The certainty with which he spoke was grounded in the eternal, unchanging God, not the temporal, ephemeral philosophies and tastes of the world.

As biblical counselors engage others who are suffering, they can do so with confidence because they have both the Spirit of God and the Word of God at their disposal. Guidance from the world is always changing, and among trained medical professionals there often is not a consensus on the effectiveness of common diagnoses and popular treatments. Today, there is even a push to use psychedelic drugs and MDMA to treat anxiety.¹⁵ But biblical counselors in an ever-changing world can tackle even the most intimidating issues with confidence because they do so with the unchanging Word of God.

The Bible and the Heart of Biblical Counseling (Matt 15:1-20)

At first, Matthew 15 does not seem relevant to the study of biblical counseling. Biblical counselors seek to help people with real problems. However, on the surface at least, Matthew 15 is about washing hands. A more thorough look at this passage reveals that it has more to do with the need for a clean heart rather than clean hands. In understanding this passage, it is helpful to become familiar with the purity laws under which the Pharisees lived and how it often contradicted the authority of Jesus. Everett Ferguson writes that the Pharisees foundation for ritual purity “was the oral law (‘the tradition of the elders’). Jesus not only rejected the emphasis on ritual purity (that which

¹⁴ Polhill, *Paul & His Letters*, 436.

¹⁵ Shayla Love, “Socially Anxious People Are Taking MDMA and Other Psychedelics to Cope,” *Vice*, August 28, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/j5ym8b/socially-anxious-people-are-taking-mdma-and-other-psychedelics-to-cope.

defiles is internal, not external), he also rejected the Pharisaic basis of authority. The oral law had actually contravened the written law in many instances.”¹⁶

As is often the case when Jesus interacts with his detractors from the party of the Pharisees, the reader can learn much more than the initial question targeted. It is important to remember that the Pharisees were not always genuine in their search for enlightenment. They were, however, devout in their attempts to keep rules. Drane notes,

One of the writings influenced by them, the *Pirke Aboth*, opened with the advice to “make a fence for the Law,” which meant, “protect the Law from infringement by surrounding it with cautionary rules which can act as a warning notice to stop people before they get within breaking distance of the actual God-given commandments themselves.”¹⁷

One need not look far before realizing how this approach could become problematic. The Pharisees’ questions were often packed with an agenda that involved trapping Jesus. Dan Doriani points out, “There is only one reason for the theological leaders of the nation to come all the way to the northern countryside (for Gennesaret is not even a town). An official delegation, they will investigate this popular teacher who behaves rather suspiciously. They came to confront this Jesus.”¹⁸ They approach Jesus with the matter of handwashing only to have him reveal a different problem that is closer than they originally thought. In this case, they wanted to know why his disciples did not wash their hands. The reader can be sure that these questions were not simply about table manners. In shining his light upon the hidden motives of the Pharisees, Jesus gives a framework for biblical counseling.

¹⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 518.

¹⁷ Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*, 38.

¹⁸ Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 37.

Outward Presentation or Inner Transformation (Matt 15:10-11)

Humans are susceptible to attack from three points; namely, Satan and his forces, the world, and ourselves. The Pharisees in this account, much like many today, seemed to have forgotten about the attacks that come from our own flesh. In a sense, the reader can understand this oversight. The world does have a strong, negative influence on people. Evil is a very real threat. However, the Pharisees in this passage skipped over another evil influence that was much closer and, in some ways, much more dangerous than the world's influence. These Pharisees ignored the evil that was in their own hearts. As Doriani explains, the Pharisees' preoccupation with rule-keeping and outward presentation was merely a cover-up for the evil in their heart that they preferred not to address:

Even at their best, most Pharisees missed the mark. Historical research shows that many of them sought to put law-keeping in a covenantal context. Jesus and Paul both say they tried to attain holiness by regulations and law-keeping. But unless the heart is right, holiness is impossible. Without love for God, the quest for holiness becomes legalistic. It substitutes human tradition for God's law and substitutes human effort for God's grace.¹⁹

This trend did not subside once the influence of the Pharisees waned. There is still a tendency today to neglect the evil of the human heart and focus all attention on the malice in the world. This is evident in the lives of some believers who seek to separate themselves from every aspect of the world, replacing earthly influence with a Christian branding of sorts. While this approach to following Jesus is not without its admirable traits, a major flaw can be seen upon closer examination.

In defense of this separation, a popular phrase emerged decades ago that said, "Garbage in, garbage out." While this is true in the world of technology and often is true for humans as well, it assumes that the primary problem is outside of oneself. It fails to address the fact that man's fundamental problem is his own heart before it is ever his environment. A person can exclude himself and his family from the world by avoiding all

¹⁹ Doriani, *Matthew*, 41.

forms of entertainment and media that do not fit with orthodox Christianity, but while they are all locked away, any honest assessment will reveal that another enemy is much closer than they initially thought.

Unlike other forms of care, biblical counseling is not concerned with the outward appearance alone. The right kind of pill can resolve the outward effects of anxiety or depression. Only in addressing the heart with Scripture can the counselor engage the matter at the core. Again, this is not to say that every problem is the counselee's fault, but rather that the heart is never neutral and therefore always worthy of attention both in counseling and self-assessment. This is yet another reason why theology matters. While many counselors and therapists operate from the standpoint of man's presumed goodness, D. A. Carson points out that "Jesus presupposes that the heart is essentially evil."²⁰

Biblical Counseling and Vision (Matt 15:12-14)

The disciples were concerned that Jesus had offended the Pharisees and felt compelled to let Jesus know. Jesus, it turned out, was not concerned. He was more concerned with the vision of the Pharisees than he was the feelings of the Pharisees. In explaining his rebuttal to his disciples, he referred to the Pharisees as "blind guides" leading the blind into a pit.

Attention is required here. It is important that the wisdom and guidance biblical counselors share with others not lead those they intend to help even further away from Christ. It is most certainly acceptable for a biblical counselor to give practical advice. However, great care must be taken to ensure that counselees know the difference between man's opinion and God's command. The former comes from the Word of God and the latter from opinions which, while hopefully shaped by the Word of God, are not on the same level. If these two categories are mixed, counseling sessions will ultimately

²⁰ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 401.

be pointless and not lead the person in need to a place where they know the power and presence of Christ in a better way than they previously did.

The Root of the Problem (Matt 15:15-20)

Peter was bold and often that boldness got him into trouble. However, thanks to that boldness, the modern reader can gain greater insight into what the Lord was saying or doing. Put another way, Peter likely said what the other disciples were thinking but too afraid to mention. France calls him “a spokesman for the group” and points to the specific wording of Jesus’ answer to support his claim.²¹ While the other eleven were likely pretending to understand what Jesus was talking about, Peter just asks him, “What did that mean?” And in Jesus’ answer, one can see some of the fundamental building blocks of biblical counseling.

Man’s primary problem is not the threats he faces from the outside, as real as those threats are. Man’s primary problem is the threat from the inside. It is interesting to examine Jesus’ list of evils that proceed from the heart. He mentions evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. His words should both frighten and comfort. They should frighten readers because they expose the depth of the depravity hidden within human hearts. William Hendriksen details that depravity brilliantly.

As to these “schemes” or “deliberations,” the word used in the original gave rise to our English word dialogue. Although the dialogue that a person has with himself need not be sinister—see Luke 2:35 in which passage the deliberations referred to are not necessarily bad—yet it is worthy of note that in nearly every passage in which the word is used the activity described is clearly of a sinful nature.²²

There is no escaping the role the human heart plays in relationships and communication.

The dialogues people have with one another and with themselves are always rooted in the

²¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 585.

²² William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 618.

heart. Words are quite revealing and of utmost importance for the do not just impact others, they reveal the true nature of one's religion and heart. In his commentary on the book of James, Douglas Moo writes, "The 'religion' that people who do not control their speech have is no better, James suggests, than idolatry."²³ These words also bring comfort because the heart, as consumed with evil as it might be, is not beyond the reach of God's grace. As Carson notes, "What concerned Jesus was not so much the form of religion as human nature. He wanted to see people transformed and their hearts renewed because he came to save his people from their sins."²⁴

The Church and Biblical Counseling (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:11-16)

It is not enough to simply point out that the Bible is more than adequate for counseling situations. It must also be noted that to use the Bible in counseling, one does not have to have years of training before accurately and effectively handling the Bible. Training is important for any Christian who is serious about the faith and devoted to growth. However, mere knowledge about the Bible, while vital, must not be mistaken for sanctification. No academic degree and nor years of ministry experience can replace the gift that Jesus gave to his followers. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the primary resource from which all other resources flow in the life of the believer. Training and continued learning are necessary for biblical counselors of all educational and experiential backgrounds, but in the process of that continued learning and growing, the believer can be confident in the wealth of resources available to him as a child of God who lives with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

²³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters of James: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 96.

²⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 402.

Instructing One Another (Rom 15:14)

The picture seen in Romans 15:14 is what Tom Schriener refers to as “the new humanity we see promised in the OT becoming a reality.”²⁵ Hearts are being renewed. People are working together and growing in knowledge, and as a result, they are instructing one another.

The practice of soul care is not reserved for trained professionals. This is evident in the New Testament’s frequent use of the phrase, “One another.” Many people balk at the idea of helping fellow Christians because they have convinced themselves that they do not have enough education. Though, how quickly they forget about the education they have been receiving for their whole lives from their Master. The believing woman who has endured the pain of miscarriage and abandonment from her husband has been educated in how to keep focused on Christ through intense suffering and heartache. The believing man who is progressing through anxiety and depression has been educated in how to speak gospel truth to other souls suffering with similar afflictions. Lovi and Westerhoff refer to Edwards, who wrote, “The godly have dullness and hardness, and often great corruption of heart, and many enemies to grapple with, and need one another’s help.”²⁶ Help might sometimes be needed from trained professionals, but it will never not be needed from fellow believers.

It is significant that Paul expresses his confidence in the Roman Christians’ ability to minister to one another, or what Moo refers to as their “Christian maturity.”²⁷ His certainty seems to be based on two characteristics in these believers. First, Paul assesses that they are full of goodness. Some believers are prone to view themselves as

²⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 763.

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Power of God: A Jonathan Edwards Commentary on the Book of Romans*, ed. David Lovi and Benjamin Westerhoff (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 321.

²⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 887.

wretches rather than saints. Many Christians simply call themselves “sinners saved by grace” as if they will just barely inherit eternal life. However, when Paul opens both of his letters to the church in Corinth, one of the most flawed churches in the entire New Testament, he addresses them as saints (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). When Christians view themselves only as wretches, they minimize the presence, power, and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. By no means are Christians perfect. But, by God’s grace, they are saints.

Second, Paul notes that these believers are filled with all knowledge. While extensive academic training is not a requirement for ministering to others, biblical training is necessary. It is evident that the Roman believers had some level of biblical training because Paul said that their knowledge was sufficient for instructing others. Readers cannot be certain about the amount of training the Roman believers had, but can be sure it was enough for Paul to say with confidence, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that these disciples were able to instruct one another.

Keith Mathison points out that Paul’s aim in the conclusion of his letter to the Romans was that these believers mature in unity with one another by not making secondary issues grounds for division: “Following the example of Jesus Christ, believers should seek to build up their neighbor rather than pleasing themselves.”²⁸ In this case, the believers’ knowledge will help them build one another up. The word Paul used for knowledge here, *gnōseōs*, relates specifically to a grasp of spiritual truth. If the believer’s knowledge is not just rooted in the spiritual *feelings* but spiritual *truth*, it will result in a sense of community among believers where each member works to build up the other.

The primary teachers in a church setting do their jobs well not when they simply inform the congregation on a topic or doctrine but rather when they inspire the congregation to grasp that topic or doctrine to such a degree that they are able and willing

²⁸ Keith Mathison, *From Age to Age: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 585.

to teach it to others. Therefore, biblical counseling must never be separated from the local church. It is in this holy connection that one can see a distinguishing mark of the movement. Rather than being helped by one professional, those seeking biblical counseling can find hope in an entire community of fellow saints.

Growing with One Another (Eph 4:11-16)

The job of a pastor or missionary is no more important in the kingdom of God than that of a lawyer or shoemaker. The value of a variety of so-called secular vocations seems simple enough, but many believers seem to forget it far too often. While the functions are different, the role of the missionary who is devoted to Jesus is not more or less important than that of the plumber who works for the glory of God. The same is true for those within the body of Christ who are gifted with teaching abilities and those who serve behind the scenes. Tony Merida reminds, “There is no sharp divide between the sacred and the secular.”²⁹ Every job that is devoted to exalting Jesus is an important job (Exod 31:1-5). There are no unimportant parts in the body of Christ. When functioning properly, each one works in its own way to make disciples. The empowerment of the Spirit, not human talent, marks the importance and effectiveness of the gifts given to and employed by believers. Ultimately, the gifts exist for the good of others and the glory of Christ. Schreiner notes, “Our God is creative and infinitely wise, and his creativity and wisdom are reflected in the gifts he has given to the church of Jesus Christ.”³⁰

Biblical counseling is discipleship. It is often a form of discipleship not confined to scheduled sessions. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis call this “mutual discipleship,” and Paul gives a picture of it in Ephesians 4. Chester and Timmis

²⁹ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman, 2014), 94.

³⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 27.

elaborate: “We need to take responsibility for each other’s godliness—not only at the level of behavior but of attitudes and underlying idolatries. Paul encourages the Christians in Ephesus to ‘speak the truth in love’ to one another (Ephesians 4:15). This means recognizing that apparently insignificant moments are actually full of significance.”³¹

When Christians offer biblical instruction and wisdom to one another, whether in a formal counseling session or not, they are growing together. Paul calls this equipping “the saints for the work of ministry.” The phrase “for the work of ministry” is important. The goal of biblical counseling is not merely to help anxious people quit being anxious or to bring healing to fractured marriages. The goal is to point others to Christ so that they can point others to Christ. Biblical counseling is a form of growing together that stems from struggling together. The word Paul uses for grow, *auxēsōmen*, is sometimes used in Scripture in reference to agriculture (Matt 6:28). The growth of plants is often quite obvious. The same should be true of believers. Just as fruit bearing trees grow for the benefit of humans, true Christian growth must always seek to benefit others. Growth in Christ does not happen in a vacuum and it is never an end in itself. The goal of growth is Christ and his people.

It is worth noting the nature of the gifts given in this list. Aside from them being given by the Holy Spirit for kingdom purposes, there is nothing particularly supernatural about them. These are not magical powers. They are given to help the recipients serve Christ by serving others. As F. F. Bruce explains, “These various forms of ministry were given to the people of God to equip them for the diversity of service which they were to render in the community, so that the community as a whole—the body of Christ—would be built up.”³² What is supernatural is the distribution and

³¹ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 122.

³² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, The New

application of these gifts. The Spirit both gives and empowers as he sees fit (1 Cor 12:11). Ferguson explains, “As in the Old Testament, when the Spirit fills the servant of God he ‘clothes himself’ with that person, and aspect of the Spirit’s authority are illustrated in the courageous declaration of the word of God.”³³ These gifts were not intended to build up personalities but rather the body of Christ. They also were not intended to be used by so-called professional ministers. Even Catholic scholar Peter Williamson notes, “The gifted people whom Jesus gives to the church are by no means confined to popes, saints, or ordained ministers. Many anointed ministries in our local communities have been given by Jesus as gifts to his bride to build up the body of Christ, whether in teaching, music, youth ministry, works of mercy or evangelization.”³⁴

Paul is clear regarding the object of the believer’s growth. Growing Christians are not maturing for maturity’s sake but for Christ’s sake. Christ is the common link that his followers are to grow toward as they minister to one another. He is the head. It is he who holds all things together. Biblical counseling is growing with one another toward Christ.

Conclusion

The days are difficult. For Christians to shine in the darkness, they must address the heart of the issues that entangle so many. They must dig beneath the surface. They must trust the living Word of God to do what only it can under the power of the Holy Spirit. It is common for those in the world, and even many in the church, to treat souls in need of care with a prescription. It is taboo to even mention personal sin when caring for others. As the world would have it, the counselee must always be viewed as a

International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 349.

³³Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 238.

³⁴Peter Williamson, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 186.

victim. While there are many cases where victimhood is undeniable, exceptional wisdom, courage, and compassion is needed to faithfully address these needs. Biblical counseling is best done when used like a surgeon's scalpel rather than a wrecking ball. There are few simple answers. Each heart, along with the situations they face, is different and requires different words, wisdom, and confrontation. Thanks to the power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit, Christians are very well equipped to handle the task before them.

CHAPTER 3
THE PATHWAY TOWARD TRAINING LEADERS
TO DO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to equip key leaders at Towaliga Baptist Church by training them in biblical counseling and creating an atmosphere where they can put the training into practice for the good of the church and surrounding community. In this chapter, the theological truths that support biblical counseling are applied practically. When Christians realize that the Bible speaks with authority and power to human sin and suffering, they will have more confidence to address specific needs in soul care.

This chapter focuses on three specific issues that relate to counseling and how trainees can be equipped to respond to them confidently with specific biblical wisdom. The first issue is anxiety and the suffering that results from it as well as the hope available to those suffering from it. The next issue is depression and why and how biblical counseling is sufficient to help those burdened by this often-intimidating condition. Finally, marital and pre-marital counseling will be addressed along with a detailed approach for ministering to couples. A common theme throughout this chapter is godly compassion and empathy as counselees relate to godly counsel. Throughout the counseling process, careful attention will be given to the presence of sin, either as a cause for the specific suffering, as a response to the suffering, or perhaps even both.

The themes discussed, while not neglecting the importance of holistic treatment, focus solely on using the Bible to address the human heart. While these issues often supplemental treatments from other disciplines, the Bible is never not needed to address

the human heart. One should examine the works of Jordan Peterson, a man who has seen his social recognition rise by great lengths in recent years. Peterson is a professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, a clinical psychologist, a best-selling author, and a highly sought-after speaker. In spite of his refusal to accept the Bible as God's true, authoritative word, Peterson relies heavily on the Scriptures in his talks and writings, even going so far as to address specific passages he has clearly spent time studying. He writes regarding man's desire for things to be in order:

This is the expression not merely of admirable self-control and self-mastery but of the fundamental desire to set the world right. This is not the cessation of sin, but sin's opposite, good itself. The Sermon on the Mount outlines the true nature of man, and the proper aim of mankind: concentrate on the day, so that you can live in the present, and attend completely and properly to what is right in front of you—but do that only after you have decided to let what is within shine forth, so that it can justify Being and illuminate the world.¹

As Peterson sees it, the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest of Scripture for that matter, is a collection of wise sayings that can really help a person out when he gets into a jam. This view of Christianity is similar to Jonathan Haidt's theory that morality comes by "some combination of innateness and social learning."² However, despite their meticulous research, what Peterson and Haidt fail to see is the larger narrative of Scripture; namely, a holy Creator God who took drastic measures to redeem his sinful people from the mess they had made. For Peterson and Haidt, Scripture's biggest offering is to help people stay on the path or to get back on it when they wander away. In reality, Scripture is the path. God's Word helps people to know God better. The Bible can most certainly help humans in crisis, but it is not merely a manual on how to deal with anxiety; rather, it is God-breathed literature that is brutally honest about man's condition and just as direct

¹ Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House, 2018), 109-10.

² Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 31.

about man's only hope being found in Jesus, the crucified, risen, and coming again King of kings and Lord of lords.

Counseling with Biblical Wisdom and Compassion

The Bible is important in biblical counseling. However, the character of the person using the Bible matters a great deal. If a counselor relies on poor hermeneutics or does not live what he proclaims, then his message will not be "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). If even good counsel is offered without wisdom and compassion, then the counselee will be left feeling beaten down and worthless, rather than "competent" and "equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The counselor must know the Bible not just as a tool to be used in a counseling session, but also as the very Word of God to be used in all of life.

The Importance of Listening

The wise biblical counselor, before ever offering any counsel, is first a listener. Biblical counseling works when significant attention is given to listening to the person as he or she shares struggles. It is not enough to simply distribute biblical truth. Counselors must guide with wisdom and compassion. Inventory forms, questionnaires used to help the counselor better understand the counselee's condition, play a significant role in this guidance. These forms offer the counselor deeper insights into what to expect and help him know how to best prepare to offer loving, biblical counsel. However, the listening portion of counseling is just beginning.

Many people begin to feel better after talking to someone about their problems, even if the listener never says a word. This seemingly simplistic assessment is not to belittle the importance of offering biblical counsel but rather to note the important role listening plays in helping the counselor to know how to best address the heart with Scripture. The information gained simply from listening goes a long way in helping the counselor do his job more efficiently. Not only does listening introduce the counselor to

the person he seeks to help, it also provides the details needed to accurately address the issues of concern.

Information gathering does not stop with an inventory form. The importance of this form continues to show itself once the actual session has begun. Counselors say a lot when they do not say anything and simply listen. Counselors say that the person they are listening to matters and is important. If the counselor does not make his compassion obvious, then even the finest exegesis and biblical faithfulness can lose its power. Even something as beautiful as biblical counseling can become as a noisy gong if the person offering it does not love enough to listen. Training the members of Towaliga Baptist Church how to counsel biblically is of utmost importance. Seeing that they use their training with wisdom and compassion is equally important.

The Importance of Compassion

One of the common critiques of biblical counseling is that it can be cold, caring more for theological truth than loving neighbor. Whether this is a fair critique is dependent on the individual counselor. Some act as if simply telling people to “trust Jesus more” and repent of their “heart’s idols” will fix everything, but more detail is usually required. In the quest for greater compassion, another mistake that must be avoided. Compassion without sound doctrine is of no value. In addressing fears that someone is battling, the counselor would be wise to examine sins that are present in that person’s heart, but he must also point them to what Dan Doriani calls “the happy fear of the Lord.”³

Thankfully, a lack of compassion is not the norm for the majority of biblical counselors. Many know that theological truth and compassion for others are not mutually exclusive. Ed Welch notes, “Only when we look to Jesus can we know that God’s love and

³ Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, Reformed Expository Commentary, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008) 108.

our suffering can coexist.”⁴ Whether compassion will be the case in the future counseling ministry at Towaliga Baptist Church depends upon training, among other things.

A major emphasis of the training of counselors at Towaliga centers on the idea of human dignity rooted in being created in God’s image as well as the fall of man that distorts God’s image in man but does not completely destroy it. The image of God demands that humans treat one another with compassion. Whatever burdens people carry, even if those burdens are creatures of their own design, there is no excuse for a lack of compassion. Sin can be accurately addressed with compassion.

The best way to train future biblical counselors to operate in compassion is to model it. When aspiring counselors hear sermons, they must see both truth and compassion on display. When they sit in to observe counseling sessions, they must see it modeled. When they are in need of care, compassion must be given to them. Compassion is not just taught. For compassion to make an impact, it must also be demonstrated. Such demonstration is the model Jesus used and his modern disciples would be wise to follow it. Compassion and listening go hand in hand. Simply listening to someone is not genuine compassion. However, through listening one can better determine the condition of the heart along with the sins that they are battling and use the Bible to address those areas specifically, rather than simply in a generic one size fits all approach.

A perfect example of Jesus’ mixture of truth and compassion can be found in John 4 where he meets “a woman from Samaria” (v. 7) who came to draw water. The woman likely came to the well when she did in order to avoid a crowd that would almost certainly, in one form or another, bring her shame for her promiscuous lifestyle. She managed to avoid the crowds but instead ran into Jesus. Rather than shame this woman, he spoke truth to her in a loving way. Jesus models that truth and love are not mutually exclusive in John 4:28-29 where the woman from Samaria excitedly leaves her water jar

⁴ Edward T. Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 106.

behind to tell the people she was initially trying to avoid about the Messiah to which she had just spoken. Perhaps for the first time in her life or at least the first time in a long time, this woman felt loved, and it came her way because Jesus cared enough to move toward her with the truth (John 4:16-24).

While much of Jesus' conversation with the woman of Samaria involved just the two of them, the disciples were somewhat aware of it. John tells that they silently marveled at the fact that he was talking to a woman (4:27). They were able to see the woman leave Jesus with joyful excitement and come back with a curious mob (4:28-30). They heard him talk about doing his Father's will (4:31-38). They saw many more people believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony (4:39-42). For counseling to be compassionate, it must be modeled. For the biblical counseling ministry at Towaliga to be a marriage of truth and compassion, it must be modeled at the top.

Biblical counselors do not listen merely because they have nothing to say. Instead, they listen so that they can say the truth in the most helpful way. When Christians counsel without compassion, they leave a void that the world's deceitful teachings are quick to fill. In an attempt to explain the types of evil that often lead people to counseling, Roy F. Baumeister compares God to a war criminal for approving of such "atrocities" as one would find in the book of Deuteronomy and also "boasting" about committing the atrocities.⁵ The biblical counselor listens with compassion to point the counselee to the attributes of God as described in the Bible and away from the musings of cynical, atheistic scholars.

⁵ Roy F. Baumeister. *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 160.

Counseling Those Suffering with Anxiety

Edward Welch writes, “As long as we know that there is really nothing to be scared about, we like to be scared.”⁶ This fascination with controlled fear is why people pay for tickets to movies and amusement parks where they know they will encounter some assortment of fear. In the theatre and on the roller coaster there is some measure of control for the consumer of fear. The scene can become quite frightening, but it is fright under control. There is an exit to the theater and there is a lap-bar on the roller coaster.

However, not all fear exists in such a controlled environment. In fact, it is the loss of control that often fuels human fears. In the real world, the comfort of control is not always available. In the real world, sometimes the ride goes through dark and twisted areas and there is no lap-bar. Sometimes the movie is all too real and seems to never end. Such is life, or at least the perception of it, for those consumed with anxiety. There is plenty to be scared of in the world. Everyone is anxious about something. While this fear can certainly be intimidating, it can also be a wonderful occasion for churches to minister to those in need. For a ministry to those suffering from anxiety be effective, the minister must be trained.

A disciple of Christ who wishes to help others, of course, does not have to be a professional, paid minister. All followers of Christ are ministers and equipped to serve (Eph 4). The training does not have to involve several years of schooling that results in diplomas and initials after a name. Studying the Bible, the human heart in general, and the human being in need specifically are huge steps in the right direction of getting prepared to offer wise, biblical counsel. Ed Bulkley notes that biblical counseling is not just sufficient when compared to other forms of professional counseling; it is superior:

In contrast to the disengaged clinical approach that professional counseling often follows, church leaders are able to care for their members and become emotionally involved with their people. Paul demonstrated this devotion to the church when he

⁶ Edward T. Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2007), 18.

wrote, “You have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you” (2 Corinthians 7:3) and, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).⁷

Add to this style of loving engagement the benefit of having key lay leaders in the church trained to minister to those suffering and the result is an army of counselors equipped to assist the pastoral staff in caring for those in need. There is no excuse for a member of a healthy church to battle anxiety on his own. Many churches have the compassion, not as many have the training, but all have the Spirit to equip them to aid suffering souls. In addition, within the church are members who bring their experiences to the table to help those in need. Bulkley writes, “In genuine biblical counseling, there is an identification with the people and a personal sharing of life. There is no hint of uninvolved professionalism. . . . Professional counselors cannot afford to invest such time and emotion in their clients. To survive financially, they have to quickly move on to the next ‘patient.’”⁸ Building on what Christians have available to them in Christ and their shared sufferings, Christian leaders can begin to see that they are capable of helping those in need, even when those needs are sometimes intimidating.

Christ Has Equipped Believers to Counsel

Paul Tripp writes, “We must not offer people a system of redemption, a set of insights and principles. We offer people a Redeemer.”⁹ In its simplest form, biblical counseling points people in need of a redeemer to The Redeemer. Any growing disciple of Jesus Christ can do help in this way. It is important that believers understand biblical counseling so that they do not begin to believe that only a professional setting can help others. Believers are not limited to the words that Jesus said when offering counsel to

⁷ Ed Bulkley, *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 292.

⁸ Bulkley, *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology*, 294.

⁹ Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 8.

those in need. Throughout His Word, guidance and wisdom from can be found from His commands. Looking to Jesus alone at the expense of the rest of Scripture’s teachings weakens the effectiveness of biblical counseling.

While biblical counseling is certainly more than prescribing a couple of verses with the promise that all promises will then be fixed, it also must be nothing less than offering biblical insights that help people see themselves and Jesus more clearly. Biblical counselors are a lot like Andrew, the first disciple Jesus called. He is not remembered for his lengthy speeches or heroic accomplishments. He is simply known for bringing people to Jesus. He brought his brother to Jesus (John 1:40-42), and he brought a kid’s lunch to Jesus (John 6:8). History tells that he continued pointing people to Jesus even as he was dying. Biblical counseling is often more than simply telling people to trust Jesus, but it is never less. Diet, history, family situations, and sleep patterns can all be addressed, but in biblical counseling they are addressed in the light of the risen Redeemer.

Trials, By the Grace of Christ, Make Believers Better Counselors

For the child of God, no trial is ever wasted (2 Cor 1:3-7). Rather, each one serves to make the Christian stronger through weakness. In this weakness otherworldly strength is forged (Jas 1:2-4). The theology of weakness and suffering is one of the many areas where the Christian worldview is set apart from the world. The world values safety and, ironically enough, it has not worked out very well. Jonathan Haidt refers to the benefit gained from hardship as “antifragility”—the idea that opposition actually makes people stronger.¹⁰ Careful students of the Bible see this most clearly in the life of Paul.

Paul was no stranger to suffering. He knew what it was like to be shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and left for dead. However, he also endured a more mysterious ailment, which he called a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). There is no consensus on what this thorn in

¹⁰ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 22-32.

the flesh was specifically, but one can be sure that it was not welcomed by Paul because he prayed three times to have it removed. A fourth prayer never happened because God revealed to him the purpose of the thorn. Paul's thorn was given to him to keep him from growing boastful and to help him more clearly see the sufficiency of God's grace. To this revelation from God, Paul replies by boasting, not in his accomplishments but in his weakness because it is there that he realizes what real power is.

Disciples of Christ are equipped to counsel not only because they have been given the Spirit but also because they have been given thorns. These thorns are the diplomas that reveal the testing that Christians have endured and, by God's grace, passed. They are often what give believers the street-cred necessary to minister to those in need.

Many who suffer from anxiety feel as though they suffer alone. While this may be true practically, it is not the case on a larger scale. Millions of people, even Christians, suffer from anxiety. Navigating through the many cases of anxiety requires much wisdom. The counselor will need to consider the background of the one he is helping; for example, much thought must be given to the role social media plays in the anxiety, particularly when dealing with teen girls.¹¹ But the counselor must also consider the role of sin. The counselor will want to ask, both himself and the counselee, how sin has contributed to the anxiety. If a biblical counselor can come to the table with his own personal account of suffering from anxiety, then much progress can be expected. In the counselor's ultimate goal of pointing sufferers to their Redeemer, it is often helpful to point them to specific instances in their own lives where thorns have been redeemed and turned into crowns. This transparency gives invaluable reminders to anxious Christians of the hope that is theirs in Christ.

¹¹ Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 154-56.

Practical Tools for Those Who Help Sufferers

The question remains: how can church members who are not full-time ministers and who do not have training from universities properly care for those in need of wise counsel. The importance of compassion, listening, and shared struggles have already been noted, but church leaders can give practical instructions to those wishing to counsel that will help counselees. As it relates to anxiety, four practical steps worth teaching are the importance of trusting God, learning how to repent of corresponding sins, replacing them with worship, and what it means to grow in the fear of the Lord.

Practical steps can be tricky for the biblical counselor. While the remedy to anxiety, or any problem for that matter, runs much deeper than a few simple steps, counselors must also be able to give the aspiring counselor and through them, the counselee, something tangible. There needs to be something that they can wrap their hands around and apply immediately. Results are rarely immediate, but application must be. Often, results are preceded by the offering of practical helps.

Telling someone to “trust God” often sounds trite. It sounds like something Christians say to someone in need when they are rushing to Sunday school, just to get them out of the way. While this most certainly can be the case, it does not have to be. Just because a statement has often been reduced to a bumper sticker does not therefore erase its validity. Those suffering from anxiety need to trust God. Trusting God begins with knowing God. A person will not trust anything or anyone that they do not know. Counselors must be taught about who God is so that they, in turn, can teach counselees who God is. The point would not be for people to pass a systematic theology class, but instead to lead them to a place where they are more apt to trust God.

Many factors are at play for anxious people and those factors need to be addressed. However, it must also be remembered that, regardless of what has led to the anxiety, the heart needs attention. One fundamental lie at the core of all anxiety is the

idea that God is either less than good, less than sovereign, or both. Before one can expect someone to trust God, he must teach them about God.

Jerry Bridges defines God's providence, or sovereignty, as "His constant care for and His absolute rule over all His creation for His own glory and the good of His people."¹² It is important that, included in Bridges' definition, the reader can see God's control as well as his love. If He is only in control but not loving, then He is a tyrant and the world is in trouble. If He is love only but without control, then He is a well-meaning grandparent and the world is still in trouble. Though, since He is both loving and in control, then believers can have confidence. This confidence would never happen apart from knowing God. Deep consideration of all of God's attributes, not just his love and his sovereignty, can go a long way toward leading the counselee away from sin and the suffering that comes with it and toward a deeper trust in and love for God.

In keeping with Paul's commands in Colossians 3:1-17 to put off sin and put on the attributes of godliness, one must remember that the battle against anxiety is an ongoing process that requires more than simply repeating a few Bible verses. Most who suffer from anxiety would, in so many words, say that they want to know everything is going to be okay. This is a legitimate desire. Thankfully, it is also a promise from Scripture. Everything really is going to be okay. Even in the most difficult times of struggling Christians are being made to love Christ and trust in him more. Tim Lane explains.

It is more than talking to yourself and trying to convince yourself to change. It involves more than telling yourself to not worry because it is wrong. It is more than thinking positive thoughts (even biblical ones). It is even more than reminding yourself of who you are in Christ! It involves talking to and relating to Christ in the midst of your anxieties, worries and fears. Since God is personal, change that he accomplishes in you will be the result of you relating to him personally as you struggle.¹³

¹² Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 13.

¹³ Timothy Lane, *Living without Worry: How to Replace Anxiety with Peace* (Charlotte, NC: Good Book, 2015), 115-16.

Finally, believers need to replace their fear of other people, situations, or the future with a fear of the Lord. Ed Welch highlights how the times when people were at complete submission to the will of God, whether they knew it or not, nothing, even the greatest sources of fear, had power over them: “Can you remember times in your life when you said, ‘God is God—I submit to his will’? At those times other people have no power to manipulate, pressure or control us.”¹⁴

The opposite of anxiety is not the absence of fear but instead the proper placement of fear. Anxiety, the fear of people or situations, is remedied by worship of God, the reverential fear of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This type of worship only makes growth steadier and faith stronger. When men are elevated, they are eventually feared. When one has too small a view of God, it is natural to be afraid of pretty much everything. Psychologists call this agoraphobia. Laymen might also call it misplaced worship. Anxiety disorders are often due to more than a failure to trust God and misplaced worship, but they are never less. Human beings are complex and so are the sources of their struggles. To help them, counselors must be patient and thorough, and along with that, remember the heart, for it is the organ from which every anxious thought finds its origin.

Counseling Those Battling Depression

Of all of the struggles a person encounters, depression may be the most intimidating to him. Because suicide is often the way that some who suffer from depression choose to end the battle, many good people who would otherwise serve as a tremendous source of help to those contemplating taking their own lives remain on the sidelines. For these would-be helpers, the stakes are too high. What if the wrong word was spoken? What if the counselee ends up choosing suicide anyway? Could the counselee be held liable? These are just a few of the questions would-be counselors might ask themselves

¹⁴ 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), 116.

before walking with someone through depression. While the concerns are legitimate, they are no cause for allowing fear to creep in and cause inaction.

The Difficulty of Depression

Counselors need confidence when helping those struggling with depression. Depression is a serious condition that must not be taken lightly. A physician may even need to step in. Heath Lambert helps counselors to grasp the complexities that often come with depression:

The Scriptures teach in the passages above that persons have two constituent parts that exist in one unique whole; these constituent parts are called the “body” and “spirit” or “inner person” and the “outer person.” The two elements may be distinguished but cannot ultimately be separated. Both are an essential aspect of a human being. Christians, therefore, should never discount either the spirit or the body. We do not counsel people to overcome their physical distress with some sort of “mind over matter” willpower. Instead, in harmony with Scripture, we take the body seriously.¹⁵

There are often many layers to treating depression. Sometimes different people, such as experts in certain fields, are needed to address those layers. However, this does not absolve the depressed person’s heart from the situation. Biblical counseling is still needed to help the sufferer.

Along with anxiety, depression is an ailment that often leads to treatment through prescribed drugs. Some of these treatments are legitimate, many are not. Even when medicine is used to treat depression legitimately, the heart still needs to be addressed. Ed Welch writes, “Even if medication relieves some of the burden of depression, it may be functioning like aspirin. That is, it takes away some of the symptoms but the root problems persist.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 95-96.

¹⁶ Ed Welch, *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2011), 21.

In the current age, everything seems to be treated by a pill. Biblical counselors must not get caught up in either extreme on this issue and must be willing to refer to medical doctors on issues outside of their field of training. Counselors must navigate through these complexities with discernment, never forgetting to treat the heart with Scripture and compassion. Biblical counselors must also remember their role.

The Common Struggle

In Mark 5, Jesus has an encounter with a nameless man with a terrible condition. The man lives in the graveyard where he spends most of his time breaking chains that people put on him, screaming, and cutting himself. Readers later find out that the man is possessed by multiple demons.

Jesus casts the demons out of this man and he is later found “clothed and in his right mind” (v. 15). Ironically, Mark never writes about the people in the town being afraid of the demon-possessed man. He does, however, document that they were afraid of Jesus (v. 15) and asked him to leave (v. 17). As Jesus was leaving, the demon-possessed man asked if he could come along, and Jesus gives an unexpected answer. He tells the man to stay, go back to his home, and give testimony to what Jesus had done for him. Obeying, the man sets off a mini revival.

Jesus did not refuse the man’s request to come along with him because he was not qualified to be one of the official disciples. The disciples were terribly flawed but still allowed to follow the Lord. Jesus told the man to stay because he was perfectly qualified to minister to the people in his town. Maybe he was not qualified for leading a church at the time of his healing, but as far as representing the change that can be found only in Christ, no mere human would have a deeper impact on this region than the one who had been so radically changed by Jesus. No one shares the message of hope better than the person once in desperate need of it and found it.

Shared experiences are crucial to ministering to those battling depression. Welch writes, “It only takes a few seconds to recognize a slick consultant who merely

dispenses answers in contrast to one who is needy before God, has walked a similar path of transparency, and now sits humbly with us, side by side.”¹⁷ Many things have changed in church culture over the years, such as a loosening of the stigma surrounding divorce. The stigma is still alive and well with depression. “True Christians don’t get depressed,” seems to be the common belief of the day. Such thinking only adds to the burden of the afflicted.

One of the best treatments for someone struggling with depression is to hear from someone else who has or is dealing with it and has found Jesus sufficient for their troubles. Charles Spurgeon serves as the perfect example of the reality of depression among even the most faithful followers of Christ. Spurgeon was larger than life. However, his fame did not grant him immunity from depression. Spurgeon struggled with depression but his struggles were the gateway through which many others walked to find the peace that passes all understanding:

It may be, that you suffer from a mental sickness in the form of depression of spirit. Things look very dark, and your heart is very heavy. . . . When life is like a foggy day—when providence is cloudy and stormy, and you are caught in a hurricane. . . . When your soul is exceedingly sorrowful, and you are bruised as a cluster trodden in the wine-press, yet cling close to God, and never let go of your reverent fear of him. However exceptional and unusual may be your trial, yet, with Job whisper these words, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”¹⁸

The weight of Spurgeon’s words that offer liberation and hope, is due to the fact that he had been in dark places and lived to see the light on the other side. If two people say the same thing, the one who has actually experienced what he said and came through on the other side with faith still intact often speaks with the most depth.

There is no reason for a member of Towaliga Baptist Church to walk through depression alone. Members are surrounded with people who can help them. However, believers must go beyond superficial relationships and foster an atmosphere of community

¹⁷ Welch, *Side by Side*, 59.

¹⁸ Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon’s Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014), 143.

in the church. Factions, rivals, bitterness, and the like keep these kinds of helpful conversations from happening. Christian community is the context in which sufferers most often find hope. Any church wishing to minister to the depressed must move beyond casual devotion to Christ and one another and toward commitment and community. Paul Tripp writes, “We cannot be content with casual relationships among God’s people.”¹⁹

Believers must be sensitive to the needs of those battling depression and must know what is at stake, but they must not be intimidated by the potential for difficulty or even failure. Filled with the Spirit, armed with the Word of God, and in some cases equipped with a past of darkness that has been redeemed by Christ, Christians can move toward hurting people with confidence and eagerness. Some people who make up Towaliga Baptist Church are able to help the jobless find work and others can help with legal or financial matters. Some members are equipped and eager to walk with those suffering from depression. These would-be counselors just need the confidence to know that they can do it. Just as Spurgeon’s trials continue to help many today, there are no doubt countless little Spurgeons in the pews who can be of tremendous assistance to those battling depression. Ministering to people with depression can be intimidating. Battling it alone can be hopeless. The only remedy is the community of Christ found in his body, the Church.

Counseling Married Couples

In Mark 5 reminds that married couples who have experienced troubles but found healing in Christ may make the best marriage counselors. Their trials were not without purpose, nor is their victory. Both are gifts to other struggling marriages. Jesus, in his sovereign will, knew that the formerly possessed man had a story to tell his countrymen and that he could tell it in a way that no one else could. Former slaves sing songs of

¹⁹ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 273.

freedom with an unmatched beauty. Couples on the brink of divorce find healing and renewal.

Before helping married couples, it is important to consider the purpose of marriage counseling. Is it simply to save a marriage? If so, one must ask what a saved marriage has to do with advancing the kingdom of Christ. Saving marriages does nothing for the kingdom of God if that saved marriage exists as an end in itself. However, if the restored couple shares their victory with other couples in a way that makes other couples marvel at what Christ has done, then something larger than divorce prevention has happened. The kingdom of Christ has advanced.

The Permanence of Marriage

It is important for counselees and counselors to understand the permanence of marriage. Marriage is more than a religious act or ceremony. It is not a contract with loopholes if one or both parties wants an escape. Marriage is a covenant. Andreas Köstenberger goes so far as to describe marriage as “a creation ordinance with covenantal features.”²⁰ Marriage predates any political party, concept, or movement. It was woven into the fabric of the universe at creation. Grasping the idea of marriage in the created order will help the work toward restoring broken marriages be more kingdom focused. The goal of marriage counseling is not simply to find an easy way out that makes as little mess as possible. Rather, biblical counseling’s goal is to advance the kingdom of Christ. While kingdom advancement can and has been done through terminally broken marriages, the target of marriage counseling should be obedience to Christ.

Personal Accountability

Many marriages spiral out of control because both parties come to the table with their fingers pointed at each other. If each individual could understand his or her

²⁰ Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 89.

personal sin and what role it has played in the marriage, then counseling sessions would be easier and marriages healthier. Dave Harvey writes, “Once I know that I am indeed the worst of sinners, then my spouse is no longer my biggest problem: I am. And when I find myself walking in the shoes of the worst of sinners, I will make every effort to grant my spouse the same lavish grace that God has granted me.”²¹

When an individual has come to understand the role he or she has played in potentially destroying his marriage, then the individual will be more likely to fully embrace God’s mercy. Once this has happened, the individual will be apt to demonstrate that mercy to the other spouse. When both parts of the marriage act in with this kind of humility and repentance, restoration and forgiveness flourish. Whether the couple in need of marriage counseling is young and just about to get married, or older and enduring intense troubles, counselors who have been humbled by their own sin and in turn have marveled at God’s grace make perfect counselors. Leslie Vernick points this out in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong*: “Choosing to act right doesn’t guarantee that your marriage will stay intact, but the possibility becomes more likely. However, even if you do all you can and your marriage fails, your children will receive valuable and life-changing lessons as they watch God at work in your life and home.”²² These “life-changing lessons” are just as true for counselees as they are for the children Vernick mentions.

Helping them See Their Sin

Most people are not in the habit of recognizing their sin. It is easier to point out the sin of a spouse and wallow in victimhood and bitterness than it is to confess culpability. While this recognition will ultimately never happen apart from a work of the Holy Spirit,

²¹ Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say “I Do”*: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2007), 41.

²² Leslie Vernick, *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2001), 191.

counselors can do their part by asking questions that will help each individual making up the couple to discover for themselves, so to speak, that the stain of sin is on them as well.

David Powlison provides two questions that help counselees see the role their sin has played in marriage: “What is your greatest struggle and need right now?”²³ and “What does the Lord say that speaks directly into what you are facing?”²⁴ This questioning is where the importance of listening really comes into play. The answers given to these questions can reveal selfishness, bitterness from past hurts, unrealistic expectations, anger, and a host of other sins that contribute to the problems that brought the couple in for counseling. These answers help expose the motives behind the marriage. Once those motives are exposed, the counselor must address them with truth, compassion, precision, and boldness. Powlison goes on to say that these two questions “express the core agenda of our discipleship.”²⁵ If counselors listen carefully, they will find patterns that need to be addressed. When they are addressed with care, transformation just might happen.

Addressing the Dirty Secret Behind Too Many Marriage Problems

The threat of pornography does not end when a couple says their vows; rather, the threat often grows more severe. Pornography is everywhere. It is on phones, in commercials, all over Netflix, and even on watches. To think that marriages are somehow immune from pornography would be foolish. Even worse, it is common to actually welcome pornography into the marriage as a tool of sorts to help couples with intimacy. This is on par with bringing burglars into the home to help with security. Pornography is a real problem and must be dealt with in a direct fashion. Direct, however, does not mean

²³ David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 55.

²⁴ Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 55.

²⁵ Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 60.

crude. Heath Lambert notes, “We cannot attain purity and morality by using language that is impure and immoral.”²⁶ It is possible to be frank without being perverted. This kind of talk is much needed in a lot of marriage counseling sessions.

However, before the counselor enters the counseling session, he must properly classify the problem. In *Porn Nation*, Michael Leahy describes the habitual use of pornography as an *addiction*, calling it “a very stark reality.”²⁷ While Leahy goes to great lengths to highlight the serious problem that pornography is, the counselor must be careful when he uses a word like addiction. Such a label can lead a counselee to remove himself from any level of responsibility, choosing instead to embrace the label as a hall pass of sorts that explains away his actions. Even worse, the word *addiction* is far too often used to replace an even scarier word—*sin*. Until pornography is seen as sin and those who give into its enticement as sinners, one will never fully know the grace and redemption found in Christ.

Couples that have been ravaged by pornography need to see the problem from all angles—they need to see it as something more than just a lust issue. Pornography must be treated not merely as an addiction, but as a cruel and deadly instrument of Satan. There is no doubt that pornography is addictive, but to simply leave it at that would allow one to believe that the condition is simply medical or psychological and not spiritual. The role of addiction is not to say that sin is not the primary concern, it is. Instead, when one sees a person’s pornography problem as an addiction it helps all parties to see other causes and address them with the gospel. Ed Welch points out, “Possible physiological tendencies do not mean that self-control is impossible or that personal responsibility is diminished. They

²⁶ Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 14.

²⁷ Michael Leahy, *Porn Nation: Conquering America’s #1 Addiction* (Chicago: Northfield, 2008), 150.

simply mean that some people must be more vigilant in situations where that sin can be easily provoked.”²⁸

Such severity is yet another reminder that simply memorizing a few Bible verses will not be sufficient for those who are hooked on porn. Sometimes, drastic practical steps need to be taken. Lambert suggests everything from limited time spent alone to being more physically active.²⁹ Pornography often has a root system that runs in many different directions and if it is to be dealt with properly, all sources must be considered.

Because pornography has become so prevalent in today’s culture, pastors and counselors must be equipped to deal with it frankly and in a godly manner. Though, they must also remember that the end goal is not simply to get users to stop accessing porn; rather, the aim is for them to treasure Christ so deeply that porn is understood for the filth that it is, and in turn, those who have been transformed by Jesus can help others who are currently in its death grip. This is kingdom advancement.

Conclusion

Training the members of Towaliga Baptist Church to counsel biblically can revolutionize the way the church looks and acts. Instead of counseling being done by paid staff members or outside sources, it can be done by lay leaders. These lay leaders can walk with counselees through their trials in ways that professional counselors cannot. When done correctly, community approach will provide a beautiful picture of biblical discipleship and community.

²⁸ Edward Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 27-28.

²⁹ Lambert, *Finally Free*, 59-74.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop a churchwide system of biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church. The first chapter of this project gave a brief overview of the make-up of the congregation while chapter 2 focused on the biblical basis for this approach to soul care. In the third chapter, a vision was given for both the theological and practical importance of biblical counseling. This chapter will focus on three specific aspects of the development of this project. First, the process of planning and preparing the curriculum and sermons will be detailed. Next, attention will be given to the actual presentation of the project. Finally, the results of the teaching and preaching will be noted.

Preparing the Project: Winter 2018

In its simplest form, this project was designed to solve a problem at Towaliga Baptist Church. This is not to say that Towaliga is a problem church that has somehow abandoned the gospel and wandered into heresy. All churches have problems, but not all of those problems could be considered foundational or fatal. Towaliga is a strong, healthy church, but like other strong and healthy churches, there are areas where improvement is needed. The issue at Towaliga in regard to biblical counseling is that many members see the duty of soul care as belonging only to pastors. Pastors and members can work together to overcome this long-held view. A better job had to be done at equipping church members as well as encouraging them to make use of what they have been given by the Holy Spirit.

In addressing the dichotomy between passive leadership and micromanagement, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin write that the proper balance is found when leaders “find the middle ground and pay attention to the team, ensuring that the leader doesn’t push too far in one direction or the other.”¹ Self-evaluation has revealed that the biblical counseling problem at Towaliga is due to passivity. The way to correct that problem is not micromanagement but rather empowerment. Informative empowerment for the purpose of significant change was a driving force behind developing a church-wide system of biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church. The process of equipping the members of Towaliga to faithfully help others is one that will be ongoing.

This project intended to help Towaliga’s members see that because God has equipped them with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, they are capable of ministering to the needs of others. Bruce Ware writes, “The Spirit wants his people to know that he has come to empower them to be witnesses of Christ, and that apart from knowledge of and faith in Christ, people cannot be saved.”² The Spirit’s work in the lives of believers does not stop at justification. It carries on through the sanctification process. Biblical counseling is never anything less than being “witnesses of Christ.” And more than merely being capable for this task, Christians are commanded to do it, both to one another and to the lost. The importance of pointing other believers to Christ is seen in the repeated “one another” passages found in the New Testament.

The story of Alex Smith served as a practical framework for the implementation of this project. It was a story told to the congregation at the beginning of the implementation process to broadcast the overall vision of the project. Smith was drafted number 1 overall by the San Francisco 49ers in the 2005 NFL draft. Like many number 1

¹ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *The Dichotomy of Leadership* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018), 50.

² Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 120.

draft picks, Smith failed to live up to the lofty expectations of fans. When the 49ers nearly won Super Bowl XLVII in 2013, Smith was on the sideline watching Colin Kaepernick do the job he was supposed to be doing. Later, Smith was traded to the Kansas City Chiefs. After several successful years where the team fell just short of a championship, the Chiefs decided to draft Smith's replacement—Patrick Mahomes. In both instances, Smith's reaction to his replacement was noteworthy. John Feinstein detailed Smith's dealings with Kaepernick and Mahomes: "Colin Kaepernick had talked about how supportive Smith had been after he had taken over for him as the starter in San Francisco. This was different, but Smith was very comfortable being in a mentoring role for someone he knew had been anointed as his successor."³

For several years, I was the primary counselor at Towaliga. I had some seminary training and was pursuing even more, and thus the implication was that all counseling responsibilities should be left to me. This model is not healthy, both from a corporate and individual standpoint. When the pastor serves the role in this way, he often burns out and too few people grow through opportunities to serve. With patience and grace, the church needs to transfer its leadership model to one that more closely resembles the eldership seen in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-16; Acts 6:1-7) and away from what Robert Thune refers to as "the anointed leader model."⁴ Thune continues to explain that godly leaders in the church "see it as their responsibility to develop and raise up other elders to serve alongside them as quickly as God allows."⁵ I needed to raise up other leaders. I needed to follow the example of Alex Smith and, in a sense, train replacements.

³ John Feinstein, *Quarterback: Inside the Most Important Position in the National Football League* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 141.

⁴ Robert H. Thune, *Gospel Eldership: Equipping A New Generation of Servant Leaders* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 25.

⁵ Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 26.

The best leaders do not do everything by themselves. Instead, they train and inspire others to do it. This type of shared leadership requires a slightly different approach to pastoral ministry. Instead of just preaching, teaching, and praying that the congregation would engage in a given ministerial activity, such as missions or evangelism, there is now a specific activity in mind: biblical counseling. Instead of simply hearing an inspiring sermon, the congregation would be exhorted to act on what they had heard and learned in specific ways. This preparation was very much like the months leading up to a mission trip where members are encouraged and equipped to grow in their faith with a specific task in mind.

Development of Curriculum and Sermons

The first goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on biblical counseling. Much of the ministry at Towaliga Baptist Church is centered around the preaching of the Bible, as well as the private ministry of God's Word. The Bible is central at Towaliga Baptist Church. Haddon Robinson writes, "We must preach to a world addressed by the TV commentator, the newspaper columnist, and the playwright. If we do not, we will have hearers who are orthodox in their heads but heretics in their conduct. Of course, in speaking to a secular world we dare not speak a secular word."⁶ This thinking is the driving force behind the preaching ministry at Towaliga. The Sunday night sermon, Wednesday night prayer meeting sermon, and quite often each week's Sunday school lesson runs parallel to the Sunday morning sermon. Such continuity is done intentionally to drive home the importance of God's Word as well as to compete with the overwhelming media saturation in which many believers find themselves. In keeping with this structure, the second goal of this project was to develop a six-week curriculum related to the basics of biblical counseling. The private ministry of the Word

⁶ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 29.

is also crucial in this regard. The sermons and teaching curriculum that made up this project were developed together to function as a cohesive unit to fill the minds of congregants with the importance of God's Word and its trustworthiness to help those in need. Lloyd-Jones writes that great change was accomplished by great men who "could speak, who could deliver a message, and who could get people to act as the result of the effect they produced upon them."⁷ Some change was needed at Towaliga Baptist Church and it needed to start with the faithful, effective delivery of God's Word.

The source and reliability of God's Word is the foundation of the sermon series and curriculum. If the Bible is to be trusted to speak life to the depressed, peace to the anxious, freedom to the addicted, and hope to the broken, it must first be established that it is the Word of God. There is a temptation to assume that hearers already grasp the concept of the sufficiency or perfection of God's Word. Kevin DeYoung explains why this is a dangerous assumption, even in strong evangelical contexts like the one found at Towaliga: "If authority is the liberal problem, clarity the postmodern problem, and necessity the problem for atheists and agnostics, then sufficiency is the attribute most quickly doubted by rank-and-file churchgoing Christians."⁸ Attention was given each week of the preaching and teaching process to a specific passage of Scripture or an issue directly related to biblical counseling.

The intention of the sermon series and curriculum was to establish Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11-16 that the people of God, equipped with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, are able to help others in need. Believers are not gifted by God the same way, but every believer is gifted by God. R. C. Sproul calls this "the beautiful diversity of

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers & Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 20.

⁸ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 45.

this organism that is called ‘the church.’”⁹ In a traditional setting like Towaliga, much emphasis is given to pastors with degrees. While this respect for education is noble, it must also be understood that initials after one’s name are not required in order to offer biblical counseling.

During the preaching and teaching process, particular attention was given to 1 Corinthians 13 to establish the importance of love in ministering to others. Donald S. Whitney writes, “No fuel for service burns longer and provides more energy than love.”¹⁰ Leon Morris adds, “Love is the one thing needful. Nothing can make up for its lack.”¹¹ The purpose here was to differentiate biblical counseling from other methods that simply try to fix a problem or even other forms of counseling within the realm of Christianity that might offer biblical solutions without love.

The preaching and teaching curriculum also focused on specific instances that would require biblical counseling. Rather than simply preaching on anxiety, depression, and marital difficulties, the emphasis here was to preach on how believers, equipped with the Spirit and the Word of God, are able to speak to specific areas of need. Each of these three practical examples was chosen because they are relevant issues both in the Towaliga community as well as the church itself.

Robert Leahy explains, “People worry because they think worrying is a sign of being a careful, responsible and conscientious person.”¹² This understanding does not remove sin from the worry equation. Simply labeling sin as a medical condition does not

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (Fearn, Scotland: Christians Focus, 2011), 109-10.

¹⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 150.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 177.

¹² Robert L. Leahy, *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 21.

make it acceptable. At the heart of worry, the wise and careful counselor can usually find some sort of sin fueling the emotion. To take Leahy's assessment a step further, worry is often a sign of sin, and more specifically, misplaced priorities and misdirected worship. The purpose of addressing this particular topic during the sermon series and in the curriculum was to motivate members to approach a person consumed with worry just as they would a person caught in any other sin—with confidence in God's Word and love for God and neighbor.

Depression and anxiety are often linked but they are unique enough to require individual treatment in the preaching and teaching curriculum. Depression is a significant source of concern in today's culture, even within the church. It has remained a part of the American landscape and continues to grow in haunting ways. Both men and women suffer from depression for a variety of reasons. The real cause for concern is how men and women deal with depression. Warren Farrell points out, "Women constitute 75 percent of those who seek professional help to prevent suicide; men constitute 75 percent of those who commit suicide."¹³ In short, depression needs to be addressed in the pulpit and an army of helpers from within the church needs to be equipped and motivated to move toward those in need. In what may be a surprise to some, many of the broken hearts on the pews of the church belong to men with tough exteriors.

A majority of the counseling at Towaliga centers around marriage, whether with couples considering marriage or those trying to save one. The purpose of addressing marriage in the sermon series and curriculum was to equip couples to counsel other couples. A counseling ministry made up of trained couples is infinitely more effective than a single pastor who does it all himself. To get to this place of effective ministry, the aim of this project was to model and teach relationships such as are seen in the best examples from the New Testament church (Eph 4; Acts 18:24-28). Tim Chester and

¹³ Warren Farrell and John Gray, *The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do about It* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2018), 274.

Steve Timmis add, “As long as people are encouraged to seek professional counseling to help them with everything from dealing with an unpleasant incident to raising their children . . . individuals become disinclined to depend upon each other in the normal routine of relationships.”¹⁴ Creating an atmosphere at Towaliga Baptist Church where members depend on one another is directly related to the purpose and goals of this project.

Selecting Participants

Selecting participants proved to be one of the more difficult aspects of the process. Towaliga is a smaller, close knit church. Everyone knew about this project, and for the most part everyone wanted to participate. In the early stages of planning, the intention was to open the teaching sessions to a select group of people while including the entire congregation for the sermon portion. However, due to overwhelming interest, the six-week curriculum was also made available to the larger congregation.

While such an approach made sense, it did not seem to fit with the overall purpose of the project, which was to train members of Towaliga Baptist Church in biblical counseling. Furthermore, simply coming to a class on biblical counseling did not then require that the person become a leader at Towaliga. With that in mind, the teaching sessions were made available to all who were interested. This approach did create some potential problems for measurement in that it would be hard to stay in contact with all who attended and thus know how effective the curriculum was for them. However, a majority of those who attended teaching sessions are core leaders of the church who would have been selected anyway. There was no problem staying in contact with these leaders. Sessions were taught on Wednesday nights during the regular Bible study time slot. Offering the sessions at this time encouraged a higher level of commitment from core leaders.

¹⁴ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 128.

From the group attending the Wednesday night six-week teaching sessions, a sample of thirty members was chosen and given a pre- and post-class evaluation of content knowledge to track their progress. Because of the strong level of commitment by core leaders to attend Wednesday night services, many of the thirty chosen participants were leaders who hold some sort of teaching position, are respected enough that other church members would trust talking to them in a counseling setting, or demonstrate a strong interest in biblical counseling.

Implementing the Project: Winter 2019

The implementation of this project served the purpose of developing a church-wide system of biblical counseling that strengthens and serves the community. The members who were trained have a high view of the Word of God and love to hear it preached. The preaching portion of the implementation was paired with the teaching portion in hopes of further inspiring listeners to become doers. Again, the aim was to saturate the congregation with the importance of biblical counseling so that they might be inspired to pursue more training and be more apt to confidently speak God's truth in service to one another and the community.

The Preaching Context

The sermon series took place on Sunday mornings during the regular worship service. Attendance ranged between 170 to 200 people per week. The six-week sermon series occurred between the week that most area schools are on winter break and the beginning of spring break. Winter and spring break play a major role in the decline in attendance at Towaliga Baptist Church, so including the implementation within this window was helpful.

The Teaching Context

Wednesday nights at Towaliga fit the traditional form for Southern Baptist churches in a rural area. At 5:30, a dinner is served and a time of Bible study begins at

6:30, which is followed by a short prayer time and choir practice. People are used to coming at this time on Wednesdays. This has been the routine for many years at Towaliga. Despite the traditional look of this service, it is not a formal event in the truest sense of the term. Even the oldest, most traditional members often show up in shorts on summer nights. Each week, the average attendance is around 50 people. The recent resurgence of the Wednesday night children's ministry has helped keep numbers steady on Wednesdays. Wednesday night was chosen for the implementation of the teaching curriculum because most core leaders are used to attending at this time but would have difficulties attending on another night of the week.

For the most part these services where the project was implemented looked a lot like the regular services. One difference between the services was the addition of notes that went along with the curriculum. These notes were used to help those in attendance to gain a better understanding of the content while simultaneously reminding them of its importance. The notes were on the screen and provided an interactive experience for those in attendance. The addition of notes was quite different from the usual expository sermon that is preached on Wednesday nights. Another difference was the conversational dynamic of the class where students had more freedom to ask questions.

The development of both the sermon series and the curriculum was completed before the first week of the implementation to ensure that both aspects of the project worked as a unified system where one part reinforced the other. The aim of the development process was to create sermons and teachings that expressed the faithfulness of God's Word, the sovereignty of God, and the ability he has given his people to minister—all in a way that was easy for hearers to grasp, remember, and apply.

Sermon 1. The first Sunday sermon addressed the trustworthiness of God's Word. Second Timothy 3:16-4:5 served as the foundation while Psalm 119:33-40 was the real source of expository preaching. The main take away from this sermon was that when believers live in the Word of God, they walk in the power of God.

Teaching session 1. The first Wednesday teaching session built upon 2 Timothy 3:16-4:5 while showing the difference between biblical counseling and all other forms of counseling. Considerable attention was given to the sufficiency of Scripture in speaking truth to those suffering from specific, modern sins.

Sermon 2. In this sermon, the exposition of Ephesians 4:11-16 was used to remind the congregation that believers have been equipped by God with specific gifts for God's specific purposes. Many in contexts like Towaliga's think of inventory tests when they think of spiritual gifts. The aim of this sermon was to move the congregation beyond a simple test used that allegedly finds a spiritual gift, toward acting on the specific gifts God has given.

Teaching session 2. The purpose of this session was to show that one does not need an office and a degree to be a good counselor. Also, counseling does not need to take place in traditional settings where appointments are made. Because of the gifts of the Spirit, a mature Christian can offer wise, biblical counsel to a friend in an informal setting.

Sermon 3. In sermon 3, 1 Corinthians 13 was used for the purposes of explaining humility. Sometimes it is easy for those gifted in counseling, or any other field for that matter, to see themselves as superheroes who exist to merely fix people. This sermon's big idea intended to help the congregation see the importance of godly love and humility in helping others.

Teaching session 3. This session stressed the importance of godly love as the driving motive behind biblical counseling. Specific examples of love's impact on the counselee, love in action during counseling, and casting a loving vision for the future were considered.

Sermon 4. For the last three sermons, specific issues in biblical counseling were addressed. However, rather than simply showing that the Bible can help people through a

specific problem, the emphasis here was on how God's people can use the Bible to help those in need by highlighting the hope believers have in Jesus Christ. In this sermon, the need addressed was anxiety and the passage used was Philippians 4:4-9.

Teaching session 4. This session delved deeper than the typical "anxiety verses" that are often used on those who worry a lot. The purpose in the fourth session was to teach people how to use specific questions to dig to the root of anxiety and specific passages of Scripture to address what is found there.

Sermon 5. Psalm 130 was used to deliver two simple points in one message. First, no believer is alone as he suffers through depression. Second, no variety of depression is too big for God to handle. The intention was to give the congregation confidence as they move toward those in need. Depression can be intimidating, but believers wishing to help must remember that relief does not ultimately come from any mere human being. There is therefore no pressure for counselors to come up with the perfect answer. Pointing to Jesus in a loving and careful manner is all that is required.

Teaching session 5. The purpose of this session was to remove the intimidation factor that many people feel when trying to help others battling depression. Again, the sufficiency of Scripture was a major theme.

Sermon 6. The final sermon of the series came from Philippians 2:1-11 and was directed at using Scripture to help marriages. The main point was that the aim of marriage counseling should not be to help couples have a perfect marriage but rather to help them look to a perfect Savior. Jesus is much more than an example to Christians, but he is never less than that.

Teaching session 6. The idea behind session 6 was that godly married couples make the best marriage counselors. Many couples disqualify themselves from such a

ministry because of their own past troubles. However, God's redemption of those past troubles further equips couples to counsel others.

Course Progression

One of the strengths of Towaliga Baptist Church is the kindheartedness of the congregation. The people took ownership of this project. It was not one man's project—it belonged to the entire congregation.

The commitment of attendees was a concern heading into the preaching and teaching sessions, but it proved to be unfounded. The congregation showed considerable interest on this subject, and while attendance was not perfect each week, numbers were steady from session to session.

As stated, the timing of these session helped with attendance. Had the sessions been held in the spring, or especially in the summer months, attendance would have likely fluctuated. Staff members did well at marketing and keeping the teaching and preaching series before the people. No one could say that they did not know about this preaching and teaching series.

During this process, some members were invited to sit in on counseling sessions, which was another area where a challenge was expected but never really arose. Fears of trying to fit fifty eager counselors into live training sessions also proved to be unfounded. Specific people with particular interests and skill sets were asked to sit in on counseling sessions that matched their gifting. In one case, a member sat in on a pre-marital counseling session and used her skill with numbers and finances to help the couple gain a better understanding of godly principles relating to a family budget. This person contributed rather than merely observing. It proved to be a good measure of the growth that had occurred due to the preaching and teaching sessions. The soon-to-be married couple commented on how much this woman's biblical insight and practical financial wisdom helped them.

After the Implementation: Spring 2019

There were no illusions that every individual who participated in the sermon series and teaching sessions would then be fully equipped in biblical counseling. The purpose of this project was to develop a church-wide system of biblical counseling that strengthens and serves the community. From the beginning of the project, members expressed an interest in further training and that interest continues to this day and has already had an impact on the community.

Evaluations

A panel of church leaders, led by the chairman of deacons, was asked to give feedback on the sermon series. An expert panel made up of mostly ministers who served outside of Towaliga's context evaluated the teaching curriculum. This panel was made up of one veteran minister, a hospital chaplain, a pastor, and a missionary who specializes in coaching missions teams. Members of the panel evaluating the sermons and teaching sessions gave anonymous feedback to promote honesty in their evaluations. One member of the panel gave several grades of what he called, "Four plus" to indicate how much he learned from a particular sermon or teaching. The expert panel contributing to this project was not the original one chosen. A professor and a second reader suggested choosing another panel that was less connected to the church. The subsequent panel is the one used for the purposes of this paper.

The feedback, both the official variety that appeared on the survey and the unofficial type that came up in normal conversations, revealed that people were happy that topics like anxiety and depression were being addressed before the church as a whole. The old saying about there being a broken heart on every pew is true. But that is not all that is true of Towaliga. On pretty much every pew there also sits a person who wants to move toward broken hearts with grace, truth, wisdom, and the love of Christ. People would be happy enough to hear sermons on depression and anxiety, but they are elated to know they are being trained to help others struggling with those conditions. For

the most part, the people of Towaliga are not content sitting and listening to sermons, as much as they value preaching from the Word of God. They want to take action, and this project gave them a tangible way to do it. The positive reviews can be explained by the eagerness of the people of Towaliga to love one another by caring for one another while also serving the community.

The expert panel evaluating the strength of the curriculum gave feedback that was both positive and direct. While they gave feedback on areas where improvement was needed, they did so with kindness and clarity. Everyone agreed that the biblical content was thorough. One expert panel member added how helpful the fill-in-the-blank style was for encouraging note taking. Another noted that he liked the layout of the curriculum, particularly regarding how it addressed specific topics that are not often discussed in church settings. Another suggested that the curriculum be more interactive, and that more context be given for each individual session. Finally, one member of the expert panel who is a bit hesitant to embrace biblical counseling suggested that a thorough psychological profile be given before engaging in such a project.

While this feedback was noted, putting it into practice was not in keeping with the scope of this project or the tenets of biblical counseling. To follow this advice would make this project cease to be about biblical counseling. The intention was not to merely heed the positive words of feedback while ignoring the more critical. Rather, in this instance, the suggestion was not used due to its lack of practical application as well as its core difference with authentic biblical counseling.

Conclusion

This project went smoothly. The first stage, planning, took the most time, but it proved to be time well spent. The next stage, implementation, was the most rewarding because it allowed all that had been planned to be applied in a practical way. The final stage, post-implementation, has been rewarding due to the results given from pre- and post-evaluation surveys. These results demonstrate significant growth in content

knowledge of biblical counseling. The importance of biblical counseling remains a theme that is frequently put before the church, both in word and in deed. The continual emphasis placed on biblical counseling will likely result in good fruit growing from this project for many years to come that will benefit both Towaliga and the community.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This project's purpose was to develop a church-wide system of biblical counseling that strengthens and serves the community. In chapter 4, details were given on how the project was carried out. In this chapter, the overall project is reviewed. First, the purpose and goals of the project are assessed. Next, attention is given to the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Then, I consider what I would do differently if I did this project again, followed by theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was directly related to the history and current functioning style of Towaliga Baptist Church. Towaliga Baptist Church has existed since 1825, and for most of that time, many of the church's ministries centered around the senior pastor who functioned much like the CEO of a corporation. Depending on the personality of the pastor through the years, the leadership wavered back and forth between micromanagement and a more hands-off approach. This approach has led to abuses of power over the years, which is to be expected. Jonathan Leeman writes, "One's potential to do harm increases as more power and authority is placed into his or her hands."¹ Little, if any, attention was given to training members in counseling since that was always seen as the pastor's job.

¹ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 151.

Through this project, the members of Towaliga Baptist Church were able to see that they have always engaged in some sort of counseling. The only question was whether that counseling was biblical. Simply by getting the members of Towaliga Baptist Church to think about biblical counseling, great advances were being made. However, the purpose was not simply to make them think about biblical counseling, it was to develop a system in the church by teaching them the importance of it and inspiring them to use it to better love God and neighbor. With this purpose in mind, the project was accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on biblical counseling. This goal was met when the deacons of Towaliga Baptist Church thoroughly examined both the delivery and content of the sermons for biblical accuracy, clarity, and relevance and gave a score of exemplary.

The sermons were on the sufficiency of Scripture, gifts of the Spirit, and the command to love, as well as how the Bible speaks to anxiety, to depression, and how it addresses marriage.

Nothing happened in this project apart from Scripture. Because of Towaliga's eagerness to embrace the Word, this aspect of the project was not a difficult endeavor. James White writes, "Scripture is utterly unique in its nature as God-breathed revelation (nothing else is God-breathed); it is unparalleled and absolute in its authority; and it is the sole infallible rule of faith for the church."² The members of Towaliga Baptist Church model White's assessment in belief and in practice.

It was interesting to see how the sermon series, which was planned out months earlier, played out in the day-to-day life of the church and the community. I was able to have good conversations with church members based on what was being taught and

² James R. White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 14.

preached. The relevance of these sermons was most clearly seen when a beloved member of our community committed suicide just a couple of days before the sermon on depression.

This tragic development was an important step in the project because the members of Towaliga Baptist Church take preaching seriously. They are devoted to both listening and responding to the faithful preaching of God’s Word. They do not just listen—they act. Gene Mims notes, “As churches experience the power of God working to bring the unsaved to Christ, they become more sensitive to unmet needs and expand their ministries to address them. In a kingdom-focused church, members naturally seek out new places to serve.”³ The sermon series inspired members to seek out new places to serve, namely through biblical counseling. Much emphasis was placed on preaching from the Bible because it is the means by which God speaks to his people. Bryan Chapell writes, “The goal of preaching is not merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect the lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher’s spiritual care.”⁴

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum related to the basics of biblical counseling. While the first goal was meant to motivate, the purpose of the second goal was centered more on education. It is one thing to want to help but it is quite another to actually know how to help. This goal was met by the approval of the expert panel that used a rubric to evaluate the scope, teaching methods, and applicability of the material that was taught. Over 90 percent of the evaluation criterion exceeded the sufficient level. The curriculum addressed many of the same topics as the sermon series but in a way that allowed the learner to gain a deeper understanding while interacting with other learners.

³ Gene Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church: A Compelling Image of an Achievable Future* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 95.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids, 2005), 25.

The third goal was to equip leaders to biblically counsel. The success of this goal was measured by an evaluation survey. The goal was determined to be successfully achieved when the *t*-test for dependent samples showed a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-evaluation survey scores. I handed out evaluation surveys to 30 of the students with 23 completing both pre- and post-assessments, or 77 percent of the class. A *t*-test for paired data showed statistically significant evidence that the class was effective. Compared to an alpha value of .05, the p-value was significantly lower at almost 0 percent. ($t = -7.84, p < 0.000000041372$). The results of the test showed that students gained a better understanding of biblical counseling. Upon grading the test, I decided to eliminate question 1 from the final grading process because it did not adequately assess whether learners gained any new knowledge about biblical counseling. The statistics listed above reflect these changes.

Feedback on the Sermon Evaluation Form and Counseling Curriculum

Assessment was overwhelmingly positive. The deacons of Towaliga noted that the sermons and the teaching were relatable, biblically sound, and helpful. The expert panel approved the biblical content and relevance of the teaching curriculum. A student who evaluated the curriculum also noted that it was helpful in moving her toward a greater understanding of biblical counseling and the role all believers can play in ministering to others because of the authority of God's Word and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The term *biblical counseling* was new for many people at Towaliga Baptist Church. It was a drastic change to think, for example, of a couple offering premarital counseling rather than the pastor providing it. However, the change required here was not merely getting rid of something old. Tim Lane points out, "Change isn't just about stopping doing something, but about actively loving people."⁵ The emphasis throughout this curriculum was the Christian's call to actively love people as they seek to glorify God.

⁵ Tim Lane, *Unstuck: A Nine-Step Journey to Change That Lasts* (Charlotte, NC: Good Book, 2019), 123.

While all of the goals in this project are important, the third is perhaps most important because it continues the learning that the project intended to begin. The intention was not to teach all there is to be taught about biblical counseling, but rather to start a process. The process begun by this project should carry on through the life of Towaliga Baptist Church and have a profound impact on the local community.

My goal in the initial proposal was to create a biblical counseling curriculum that an expert panel would measure with a rubric. Upon implementation of my project, a panel of deacons gave feedback on the sessions I taught, but this did not reach the standard of the original goal. After a consultation with faculty, the goal was changed to the development of a six-week curriculum related to the basics of biblical counseling. Success of this goal was measured by an expert panel who used a rubric to evaluate the curriculum. Success for this revised goal was that at least 90 percent of the rubric criteria scored at the “sufficient” level or higher. The new panel was composed of a missionary with several years of experience in counseling, a hospital chaplain who is seeking ACBC certification, an associate pastor with over 40 years of experience in counseling, and a church planter with a doctoral degree in biblical studies. The lesson plans for each session were emailed to the expert panel on August 29, 2019, and I asked them to return their assessments as soon as possible. Most returns came the same day. One came the next day. All scores for each session exceeded the 90 percent sufficient standard. Reviewers also provided helpful comments that have been noted earlier in this chapter.

Strengths of the Project

This project had numerous strengths. First among them was the fact that it addressed Towaliga Baptist Church’s need for a more streamlined and healthy system of biblical counseling. This project did not aim at a broad, unmeasurable target such as increasing the spiritual awareness of members or helping them to love more. While noble, such objects are hard to define and even harder to measure. The goals of this

project existed simply to inform the members of their ability to counsel biblically and begin to equip them to do it well.

Much of what was taught throughout this project was rooted in examples of how badly both the world and the church need biblical counseling. The world is a dark place, evidence of the Fall is obvious and despair seems to reign. Despite the culture's excesses, anxiety and depression are on the rise, and to a certain degree, for good reason. David Wells writes, "When the world becomes meaningless, it also becomes dangerous."⁶

A second strength of this project was that it helped strengthen the church. A topic such as biblical counseling almost forces people to think beyond themselves and move toward their neighbor. It also helps create an environment within the church where people feel free to bear one another's burdens. This project made the sense of community in Towaliga Baptist Church stronger than it already is. One man told me, "I think we just need to listen to each other better." That would certainly be a good starting point.

A third strength of this project was that it equipped the church to better deal with other people's problems. Instead of simply referring individuals or couples in need of help to a professional, the members and leaders of Towaliga Baptist Church are now better equipped to move toward others in love and with truth. This new training will only serve to increase the evangelistic efforts of the church. Towaliga Baptist Church is on its way to becoming a place of hope for those in the community who need help.

A fourth and final strength of this project is that it gave people a chance to serve who otherwise would not have. Many people in Towaliga Baptist Church serve in visible ways, like singing or teaching. Others want to serve but do not because they have been led to believe that all service must be public service or requires an above-average gifting in music or speaking. This project provided an opportunity for people in the shadows to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and his church.

⁶ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 191.

Weaknesses of the Project

While there were many strengths, the project also had weaknesses. One weakness of this project was that I would have liked to include more people as observers of actual counseling sessions. Demand for counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church is somewhat high, but not enough to accommodate the number of people interested in biblical counseling. Certain key leaders were able to sit in on these sessions, but it would have been helpful for more participants to have had this opportunity.

Another weakness of the project was attendance to the weekly sermons and the teaching sessions. Overall, attendance was good, but a pastor always wants to see 100 percent participation. Efforts were made by those who missed a session to make up for what was missed by getting notes of the session, but even that is not the same as actually being there. Simply put, it is difficult to get people, sometimes even leaders, to come to church for more than a couple of weeks in a row.

A final weakness of the project was the inability to spend extended amounts of time focusing on specific issues and how they relate to biblical counseling. Anxiety and depression are all over the headlines, but they are not just in the headlines. They show up in the pews as well. While some time was given to each topic, both are worthy of extended weeks of biblical analysis. On a positive note, this project did provide the platform and the opportunity for further, more in-depth examination of both topics and how they fit with a biblical worldview.

What I Would Do Differently

If I had to start all over again, I would take a bit of a different approach. It would have been more beneficial to the church body for one specific issue, such as anxiety or depression to be addressed in depth. The church would have benefited more from this approach.

Numerous people in my church suffer from anxiety or depression. It would serve them better for me to spend time researching these specific topics, what the Bible

says about them, and how sufferers should or can respond. While these topics were covered, I would have liked to have spent six weeks on anxiety and depression alone.

Many questions abound on anxiety and depression as they relate to the church. What is the best way to counsel kids who are worried all the time? What is the difference between depression and healthy mourning? Answering these questions would have served Towaliga as well as other churches in the community that do not have biblical counseling resources.

I would have also spent more time on biblical counseling as it relates to sexual issues. Sexual confusion is rising by the minute. Ed Shaw notes, “What the Bible clearly teaches sounds unreasonable to many of us today. And so, it’s (not unreasonably!) being rejected all over the place. A few high-profile leaders in our churches have already broken ranks.”⁷ It would be good to provide material and learning opportunities to counteract those who have broken ranks and are now influencing many away from the traditional, biblical ethic. Also, children are becoming sexualized at younger ages. There is a tremendous lack of worthwhile material helping Christian parents discuss sex with their children. My church, and others as well, would greatly benefit from more wisdom on this issue. If more was written on this subject, church leaders could do a better job of guiding members through these complex issues.

A final area I would change would be the attendance of one young man to the meetings. This problem predates the implementation of the project but proved to be a great distraction to others. The young man wanders around campus when we have services and always seems to find his way in and out of buildings at inopportune times. When I have confronted him, he settles down for the moment but always seems to be back again to cause more trouble. That trouble includes, but is not limited to, talking loudly in the middle of services or teaching sessions. His grandmother is with him but

⁷ Ed Shaw, *Same Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 21.

does nothing to keep him under control. Eventually, I publicly confronted the young man. This definitely cut down on the distractions, but he and his grandmother essentially stopped coming. I hate losing them, but they were becoming a roadblock to the rest of the group grasping the concepts being taught.

Theological Reflections

Several theological truths of note have been reinforced from this project. First, the truth of God's Word was on full display throughout the teaching and preaching portion of the project. The power and effectiveness of the Bible is where the real beauty of biblical counseling is most clearly seen. As the name indicates, biblical counseling is counsel that finds its roots in the very breath of God. I grew up in a church setting where a heavy emphasis was placed on preaching from the Bible. The church I grew up in stood strongly on the side of inerrancy during the heated SBC debates of the 1970s and 1980s. Reverence for the truth of God's Word is in my spiritual DNA. Today, I remain committed to preaching verse-by-verse through the Bible. Diving deeper into biblical counseling has helped to reinforce what I already knew.

When I preach, I am delivering the Word of God. However, I sometimes get discouraged and wonder if anyone is really grasping what is being said. When I counsel biblically, which is a microcosm of sorts of preaching, I get to see up close that people really do get the truth of God's Word. I live in an area where even unchurched people have a relatively high reverence for God's Word. To some degree, they acknowledge its truth. When I use the Bible in counseling, most counselees see it as the words of God, not me. This high view of God's Word is incredibly helpful, but it also serves as a caution. The Word of God is powerful, but like many powers, it can be used for good or evil. Throughout this process, I was reminded of the importance of Christ-centered, faithful, humble hermeneutics. Good biblical counseling can never be separated from good hermeneutics. Grant Osborn reminds us of both the simplicity and importance of hermeneutics when he notes, "The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is quite simple—to

discover the intention of the Author/author.”⁸ Christians must be careful not to pervert the Author’s intention to better fit their own.

Along with the truth of the Bible, the power of the Bible was on full display throughout this project. Both research and personal experience gave me new pictures of power. In my studies related to this project, I read of lives completely transformed by the Spirit and the Word. Through my own counseling, I was able to witness what almost seemed to be a light coming on as people were embraced by God’s truth. Perhaps best of all, I heard stories of people helping other people with the Bible as their guide.

When I was younger in my faith and I heard about power, as it related to spiritual matters, thoughts of raising the dead, making blind people see, and fighting demons would immediately come to mind. Over time I have come to see the power of God in a clearer context. While God certainly has the power to raise the dead and defeat demons, it is his power to defeat sin and raise people up from the pits of affliction that is sometimes missed because too many are looking for something more flashy. God’s power is not reserved for the supernatural—it is just as clearly seen in the teenager with an eating disorder who repents, and through prayer, Scripture, and wise counsel, comes to see herself as God sees her. Michael Horton reminds, “God always exercises his power in wisdom, knowledge, and truth.”⁹ Biblical counseling makes this revelation clear.

A final theological reflection relates to the beauty of the body of Christ. Ten years ago, shortly after becoming the pastor of Towaliga Baptist Church, I had to preach a funeral for an unchurched family I did not know. They clearly did not know me either because they asked if I could lead the congregation in a hymn—I have no musical abilities. I ended up leading the hymn, thinking that all I would have to do is sing the first

⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 25.

⁹ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 260.

few words before the crowd eventually started singing and overpowered my monotone voice. I had forgotten that this was an unchurched crowd. They did not know the hymn I was leading. They probably did not know any hymns. So, I sang a solo, until some people on the back row stepped up. About six people from Towaliga were there to cook food for the family. When they saw me struggling, they started singing loudly. My terrible solo turned into one of the most beautiful ensembles I had ever heard.

That singing serves as a beautiful picture of what pastoral ministry, particularly as it relates to biblical counseling, is supposed to look like. Pastoral ministry cannot be one man doing all of the work. There must be an ensemble of other believers, eager and equipped to speak the truth in love to those in need of counsel. Over time, I have seen that happen at Towaliga. We still have a way to go, but the soloist is not singing alone anymore; the members of the ensemble are just warming up.

Personal Reflections

This project changed me in ways that I never expected. I was introduced to biblical counseling over a decade through the works of Paul Tripp and David Powlison. I was blessed to be able to take Tripp for a class at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary while completing my Master of Divinity. By the time I completed that class, I wished that I had taken more biblical counseling courses. Shortly after the class was completed, I became a pastor. It did not take long for me to get introduced to the “broken hearts on every pew” I had been hearing so much about. By then, I was wishing I had majored in biblical counseling and had Tripp and Powlison on a retainer.

Robert Jones’ classes were a personal highlight of the educational process that accompanied this project. In one class he assigned a personal assessment. Students had to write a paper where they counseled themselves. I took this project seriously and I am glad that I did. My personal assessment forced me to grapple with wounds from my childhood and the more recent pastoral ministry years. I was tired and anxious and Jones’ assignment gave me an opportunity to figure out why. I took his assignment a step further and rather

than simply assessing myself, I went to see a biblical counselor to help me with the anxiety and weariness I was experiencing.

I saw two counselors who could not have been more different. The first counselor helped me address some of the underlying sins behind my anxiety. I have a desire to be in control of all things and to be perfect at all times. In Christ, I have freedom from this way of thinking. Some of my troubles were rooted in the fact that I was relying more on myself than the perfection of the sovereign Christ. Understanding this specific sin in my life proved helpful. The other counselor listened more. He used Scripture to talk to me and assess the condition of my heart, but we also talked about other things. We talked about sleep patterns, workload, and even if it was time to step away from pastoral ministry. These sessions were equally refreshing.

At the same time, I was hearing people in my biblical counseling classes talk about integration. Integration in this context referred to the mixing of Christian counseling and psychology, or human wisdom and theory. In their devotion to biblical counseling, some of these students talked about how offering common sense advice to a counselee was integrationist. For example, the girl who is severely afraid of public spaces does not need to go to Wal-Mart on a busy day to address her fears. She just needs to trust Jesus more and repent. I could not help but think of some of the fears I was wrestling with and how practical advice, along with solid biblical counseling, helped me so much. Did this make me an integrationist? It appeared so. This realization impacted the way I counseled as well as the way I approached this project.

Did the girl I was counseling who had lost several people close to her need to trust Jesus more? Did she need to repent? Of course! But who does not need to repent. Throughout this project I have learned that faithful biblical counseling is not just rooted in the Word of God. Biblical counseling also takes the time to assess the situation and its many layers. It is too rooted in the love of God to settle for pat answers.

I am thankful for this internal wrestling match I had with myself as a result of this project. It changed the way I thought about biblical counseling as well as how I approached those I seek to help. It helped me relate to their pain in ways that I otherwise would not have been able to and has given me the ability to share the hope of Christ and the truth of his Word with greater eagerness, empathy, and joy.

As this project grew to a close, it became evident that my nearly eleven-year tenure at Towaliga would soon come to an end. I accepted a job teaching at a local school. Though, upon informing leaders of my resignation, they asked if I would be willing stay on and serve as a pastor of preaching and teaching. After much prayer, I accepted this offer. All the while, I could not help but think of this project. For Towaliga to thrive through what would be for them an unusual transition, other leaders would have to fill new roles, namely those related to counseling. This new development gave me extra motivation in following through, even after the official completion of the project.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to develop a church-wide system of biblical counseling at Towaliga Baptist Church that strengthened the church and served the community of the glory of Jesus Christ. Just before the writing of this paragraph, I spoke with a leader in my church who suffers from depression. He told me how much these sessions helped him. He is one of many examples. God demonstrated his faithfulness throughout this project, and I anticipate His work to continue as a result.

APPENDIX 1

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

This rubric was designed for the deacons of Towaliga Baptist Church to evaluate the six-part sermon series on biblical counseling.

Biblical Counseling Sermon Series Evaluation Form for Deacons

Participation Agreement

Towaliga Baptist Church is committed to biblical counseling. Along with this commitment, we believe that all believers, not just professional ministers, can counsel biblically. This counseling can take place in traditional settings as well as in casual conversations. The purpose of this project is to promote an atmosphere at Towaliga Baptist Church where wise and loving biblical counseling is always taking place among the congregation. The following assessment plays a part in moving us forward in that process.

This research is being conducted by Jay Sanders for the purpose of collecting data and assessing tools. All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project. Participation is voluntary and you are free to excuse yourself at any time. By participating in this process, you are giving your permission for your responses to be used throughout this project.

1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermons are clearly relevant to biblical counseling.					
The sermons are faithful to the Bible's teaching on counseling.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The main point of the sermons is clearly stated.					
Other points in the sermon clearly support the main point.					
Practical application is clear.					
The sermons cover the biblical text sufficiently.					

APPENDIX 2

SIX-WEEK CURRICULUM RELATED TO THE BASICS OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Becoming A Helper

Week One

The Sufficiency of Scripture

What is biblical counseling?

Biblical counseling is the _____ process of a Christ-follower using the Bible to lovingly offer help and guidance to another person.

What is the primary target in biblical counseling?

Biblical counseling is set apart from other forms of counseling in that it focuses on what the Bible says about the _____. Many problems that humans face are more complex than a simple heart issue. However, no problem is ever less than a heart issue.

Matthew 15:10-20

What role does the Bible play in this kind of counsel?

The Bible helps us to better _____ God so that we can trust him more. It also gives us guidance in knowing his will and fighting against sin and temptation.

2 Timothy 3:16-4:5

How does our view of Scripture impact the way we use the Bible to help others?

If one part of God's word cannot be trusted, _____ can be trusted. Also, it is important to remember that while some may be specifically gifted or trained to preach the Bible, every believer is capable of using the Bible to help others. This is why our interpretation of Scripture is very important. _____ is king.

Titus 1:1-3

Is biblical counseling a sufficient means of addressing problems such as cutting or eating disorders that are not specifically mentioned in the Bible?

Yes. Even the most current problems still involve the _____ and Scripture speaks to the heart.

James 4:1-10

Becoming A Helper
Week Two
The Believer's Power To Help

1. Every believer has been equipped with and by the _____ (John 14:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

2. Our growth in godliness is a _____ (Ephesians 4:12-14; James 5:19-20).

3. Our words must be _____ and our motives must be _____ (Ephesians 4:15, 29).

4. Every believer, not just the _____, plays a part in the growth of other believers (Ephesians 4:16).

5. This is _____. It is a life-long _____, not a one-time _____ (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Becoming A Helper
Week Three
The Importance of Love

1. If we simply aim to _____ apart from loving the one with the problems, we aren't doing much good (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

2. Love is often what separates _____ from wise, biblical counsel.

3. The one offering counsel needs just as much _____ as the one receiving counsel. Sometimes love doesn't come easy for us (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

4. Love keeps us from sounding like the _____ and instead makes us look like _____ (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

5. Godly love enables us to help others deal with their _____, persevere through the _____, and hope for the _____ (1 Corinthians 13:4, 8-13).

Becoming A Helper
Week Four
Help for the Anxious Heart

There are often many layers to anxiety. It's never enough to simply tell an anxious person to trust God and move on. However, it is just as unhelpful to avoid addressing areas where they might not be trusting God as they should. In doing this, we are wise to show them the character of God.

God is completely different from anyone else we have ever known.

1. He is truly _____ (Ephesians 4:11-12).
2. He never _____ (James 1:17).
3. He is _____ (Psalm 90:12).
4. He is _____ (1 Kings 8:27).

God also has attributes that we can relate to. Of course, his attributes are without sin and infinitely larger than what we have experienced in other people.

1. He is _____ (1 John 3:20).
2. He is _____ (Titus 1:2).
3. He is _____ (Psalm 106:1).
4. He is _____ (1 John 4:8).
5. He is _____ (Isaiah 6:3).
6. He is _____ (1 Corinthians 14:33).
7. He is _____ (Deuteronomy 32:4).
8. He is _____ (Isaiah 48:11).
9. He is _____ (John 3:36).
10. He is _____ (Psalm 115:3).

Becoming A Helper
Week Five
Helping The Brokenhearted

Depression, like anxiety, is multi-layered. Read two Bible verses and call me in the morning will not work and it is not biblical counseling. This will be a process that will require your patience and love for the one you are helping.

Here are just some of the things you will want to prayerfully consider with the one you are helping.

1. They are not _____ in their suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Hebrews 4:14-16).
2. They may be carrying _____ they were never meant to carry (Matthew 11:28-30).
3. They may be living with _____ they need to give to Jesus (Psalm 32:1-4; Psalm 51).
4. In Christ, they have a _____ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
5. In Christ, they have a _____ (1 Peter 1:3-9).
6. In Christ, they are _____ (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

Becoming A Helper

Week Six

Marriage

You do not have to be an ordained minister or a licensed counselor to help married couples. Engaged couples, those who have been miserably married for decades, and everyone in between can benefit greatly from a couple who has been through difficulties while holding on to Jesus and one another.

Here are six helpful questions that help married couples get to the root issues.

1. Am I displaying the _____ in my marriage (Philippians 2:3)?
2. In what ways are my _____ showing in my marriage (Philippians 2:4)?
3. What are some specific areas where I can _____ my spouse in a Christ-like way (Philippians 2:7)?
4. In what ways can I better _____ my _____ for my spouse (Philippians 2:8-9)?
5. How is Christ _____ in my marriage (Philippians 2:9-11)?
6. In what ways am I acting as though my marriage exists for _____ (Philippians 2:9-11)?

APPENDIX 3

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING SIX-WEEK CURRICULUM

This rubric was designed for an expert panel consisting of a variety of ministers with several years of experience in church ministry and counseling.

Biblical Counseling Curriculum Assessment

Towaliga Baptist Church is committed to biblical counseling. Along with this commitment, we believe that all believers, not just professional ministers, can counsel biblically. This counseling can take place in traditional settings as well as in casual conversations. The purpose of this project is to promote an atmosphere in Towaliga Baptist Church where wise and loving biblical counseling is always taking place among the congregation. The following assessment plays a part in moving us forward in that process.

This research is being conducted by Jay Sanders for the purpose of collecting data and assessing tools. All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project. Participation is voluntary and you are free to excuse yourself at any time. By participating in this process, you are giving your permission for your responses to be used throughout this project.

1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum is clearly relevant to biblical counseling.					
The curriculum is faithful to the Bible's teaching on loving and caring for one another.					
The teaching methods used encouraged active engagement.					
The main point of each lesson is clearly stated.					
Other points in each lesson clearly support the main point.					
Practical application is clear.					
The curriculum covers the topic sufficiently.					

APPENDIX 4

PRE- AND POST-CLASS TEST

These items were designed to measure the growth of participants in the six-week training session.

Towaliga Baptist Church is committed to biblical counseling. Along with this commitment, we believe that all believers, not just professional ministers, can counsel biblically. This counseling can take place in traditional settings as well as in casual conversations. The purpose of this aspect of the project is to promote an atmosphere in Towaliga Baptist Church where wise and loving biblical counseling is always taking place among the congregation. The following assessment plays a part in moving us forward in that process.

This research is being conducted by Jay Sanders for the purpose of collecting data and assessing tools. All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project. Participation is voluntary and you are free to excuse yourself at any time. By participating in this process, you are giving your permission for your responses to be used throughout this project.

Biblical Counseling Pre- and Post- Evaluation

Name:

1. I have completed all sessions.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
2. I have a thorough understanding of what biblical counseling is.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
3. Biblical counseling is the same as psychology but with more biblical insight.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
4. Biblical counseling is fueled by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
5. The motives behind biblical counseling must be God's glory and love of neighbor.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
6. The brain should be the primary target in each biblical counseling session.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
7. Counselors should not rely on the Bible too heavily during sessions.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

8. Pre-marital counseling is done in order to get a discount on the marriage license.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

9. You do not have to be a pastor to be a biblical counselor.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

10. The Bible is a sufficient tool for ministering to someone who suffers from panic attacks.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

11. Biblical counselors should always refer people who are suffering from depression to a psychologist.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

12. Biblical counseling is a sufficient form of treatment for those suffering from what society often refers to as “mental illness.”
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

13. 13. Most problems addressed in biblical counseling will be resolved after one or two sessions.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

14. The Bible does not address modern problems such as cutting and eating disorders and therefore should not be a primary resource in counseling sessions where these issues are being addressed.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

15. Homework is an effective tool for offering hope to those seeking biblical counseling.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

APPENDIX 5

GRADING RUBRIC FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING PRE- AND POST-EVALUATION

Question 1 is binary due to it simply being a screening question. The answer to question 1 is not included in any statistic. The maximum score of the evaluation is 70 points.

There are 14 questions with the maximum point value of 5 for each question.

KEY: A = 1 means one point for the question, B = 2 means 2 points for the question, C = 3 means 3 points for the question, etc.

1. A = 1 Any other choice = 0	2. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1
3. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5	4. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1
5. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1	6. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5
7. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5	8. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5
9. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1	10. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1
11. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5	12. A = 5 B= 4 C= 3 D= 2 E= 1
13. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5	14. A = 1 B= 2 C= 3 D= 4 E= 5

15. A = 5 B = 4 C = 3 D = 2 E = 1	
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APPENDIX 6

T-TEST

This paired *t*-test was designed to document the change in knowledge from the beginning of the six-week sessions to the end.

T-Test

Participant	Before	After
1	42	69
2	42	69
3	23	69
4	59	69
5	54	57
6	36	59
7	47	54
8	49	57
9	53	59
10	32	66
11	33	64
12	40	60
13	45	65
14	47	65
15	46	52
16	52	69
17	47	69
18	41	58
19	41	62
20	49	61
21	52	51
22	38	67
23	41	58

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
Mean	43.8695652	62.1304348
Variance	66.9367589	33.9367589
Observations	23	23
Pearson Correlation	-0.2514025	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	22	
t Stat	-7.8381229	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.1372E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.71714437	
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.2744E-08	
t Critical two-tail	2.07387307	

Essentially, there is a 0.000000041372 percent chance that the class did not help the church understand biblical counseling.

Expert Panel Curriculum Evaluation Rubric Scores

	Lesson 1	2	3	4	5	6
Expert 1	100	100	100	100	100	100
Expert 2	100	100	100	100	100	100
Expert 3	100	100	100	100	100	100
Expert 4	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average:	100	100	100	100	100	100

100=100% of criteria at or above the sufficient level

Student Curriculum Evaluation Rubric Scores

Student 1	2	3	4	5	6
100	100	100	100	100	100

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCING BIBLICAL COUNSELING AT TOWALIGA BAPTIST CHURCH IN JACKSON, GEORGIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stuart W. Scott

This project examined the role of biblical counseling in Towaliga Baptist Church, a small, rural church. The specific make-up of Towaliga Baptist Church was outlined in chapter 1. In chapter 2, heavy emphasis was placed on the supremacy of Scripture being more than a doctrinal distinctive but a reason for all believers to confidently offer biblical counsel to those in need. Chapter 3 demonstrates how all believers have the gift of God the Holy Spirit and are therefore competent to counsel. In chapter 4, common issues that typically bring people into a counselor's office are addressed, offering specific examples of how Scripture speaks to sin and human emotional suffering. Chapter 5 includes my reflections on the project.

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