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TRAINING BIBLICAL COUNSELORS TO ADDRESS
MID-LIFE ISSUES AT KINDRED COMMUNITY
CHURCH IN ANAHEIM HILLS, CALIFORNIA

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TRAINING BIBLICAL COUNSELORS TO ADDRESS
MID-LIFE ISSUES AT KINDRED COMMUNITY
CHURCH IN ANAHEIM HILLS, CALIFORNIA

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To my wife, Minna,
and our children, Jonathan, Benjamin, Katherine and Mia

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PREFACE

I thank my Lord Jesus Christ who saved me and put me into service. May this project be used to bring the truth of His Word and Christ-like compassionate care to those struggling with life's problems and difficulties. "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" (Ps 115:1)

This project would not have come to completion without the loving and faithful support of my family. My wife, Minna, is a gifted biblical counselor whose passion for this ministry exceeds my own. I am grateful for her steadfast encouragement through the completion of this project. I am also thankful for our children Jonathan, Benjamin, Katherine, and Mia, who love the Lord Jesus Christ and have a desire to serve the church. My parents, Sung Wook and Haesoon Nah, have given me critical support and encouragement to further my education in this field. I would not have been in this program without them.

I am thankful for the many people God has used to instill in me a high view of the sufficiency of Scripture. Pastor John MacArthur and Pastor John Koh led me to Christ and taught me the authority of God's Word. My professors at the Master's Seminary taught me to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2) and gave me the tools to rightly divide Scripture. I am blessed to serve on staff at Kindred Community Church under my Senior Pastor, Philip De Courcy, who faithfully preaches God's Word verse-by-verse and models what it means to love God's Word. I pray that I would be a faithful servant of God's Word and the training that I have received through these men.

When I first became a pastor, I had a passion for preaching but did not see the critical importance of counseling in the church. A number of men helped correct that deficiency. Dr. Stuart Scott and Dr. John Street showed me how important it is to apply

God's Word to life. Dr. Jim Newheiser showed me a vision for how the ministry of biblical counseling could be implemented in the local church. Pastor Dave Doyle and Dr. Matt Shackelford laid the foundation for biblical counseling at Kindred Community Church. Dr. Robert Jones and Dr. Jeremy Pierre have given me invaluable training in counseling methodology and enriched my life through their biblical wisdom. I especially want to thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Stuart Scott, who guided me through the completion of this project. He is a spiritual example to me of what it means to give compassionate and biblical care for God's people.

Acts 12:24 gives this description of the early church's ministry: "But the word of God increased and multiplied." It is my prayer that the Word of God would continue to be spread through the ministry of the local church to the glory of God. Both preaching and counseling are essential ministries of the church. May this ministry project be used by the Lord to honor His Word.

Daniel Yooshuk Nah

Anaheim Hills, California

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kindred Community Church exists to “glorify God by making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world.” The task of making disciples is accomplished by evangelizing unbelievers both locally and internationally. Kindred Church is active in local outreach and also helps support sixteen full-time missionaries who minister around the world. The task of making disciples is also accomplished by teaching the Word of God to believers in Christ (Matt 28:18-20). The priority of teaching at Kindred Community Church is expressed through two practical commitments. First, there is a commitment to the public preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. Second, there is a commitment to the practice of biblical counseling. The preaching ministry at Kindred takes the Word of God and heralds it to a wide and diverse audience; biblical counseling takes the truths of Scripture and applies them to individuals dealing with specific problems. The ministry of biblical counseling is a form of targeted discipleship. Kindred Community Church is committed to equipping believers to counsel one another using the Bible as a means of fulfilling the church’s mission to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Context

Kindred Community Church was founded in 2003 with a strong commitment to the public preaching of the Bible. The founding senior pastor, Chuck Obremski, was known for his infectious love for Scripture. In its early years, the church experienced immediate growth and purchased an 80+ acre church property in Anaheim Hills, California. The church’s property existed in an expanding residential area and was accessible to a number of key freeways connecting all of Orange County. Two years after

the founding of the church, Obremski passed away after a battle with cancer. In 2007, after an extended pastoral search, the church welcomed Philip De Courcy as the new senior pastor.

Under Pastor De Courcy's leadership, the church continued to strengthen its reputation for having a strong commitment to the preaching of God's Word. De Courcy was trained at the Master's Seminary and is known for his verse-by-verse exposition through books of the Bible. Today De Courcy's messages are heard on over six hundred radio stations across the United States through the non-profit organization "Know the Truth." The church supplements the strong teaching of God's Word from the pulpit with adult equipping classes designed to teach the scope of Christian doctrine and devotion. The church also features a strong small group ministry designed to promote the fellowship of the saints and the application of God's Word (Acts 2:42).

The church currently holds two regular Sunday worship services at 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Each worship service is approximately ninety minutes in length. The church averages over 1,600 people on campus each Sunday. In 2019, Kindred received over 1,000 unique new visitors to campus and added 115 adult members over the course of the year. The church membership spans the geographical range from Rancho Cucamonga to the north, Lake Forest to the south, Manhattan Beach to the west and Perris to the east. A heavy concentration of the church's membership resides in the cities of Anaheim Hills and Yorba Linda. Kindred is currently in a season of growth and anticipates continuing to grow in the near future.

Biblical Counseling at Kindred Community Church

In 2011, Kindred Community Church launched a biblical counseling training program to extend the ministry of God's Word in the life of the church. The program was led by Dave Doyle who serves as the Pastor of Ministry Development at Kindred. The training was designed to reflect the high view of Scripture upheld by De Courcy in the

pulpit each Sunday. The training was also designed to reflect the heart of pastoral care modeled in De Courcy's personal shepherding ministry. Although De Courcy's primary responsibility is to preach God's Word from the pulpit, he also counsels extensively on an informal basis as part of his pastoral care for the church. In 2014, I was hired as a staff pastor to oversee the areas of Assimilation, Small Groups, and Counseling. Under my leadership, the counseling training program has continued to develop and grow.

The biblical counseling program was founded upon the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16). The training program was based on the fundamental conviction that secular psychology did not need to be integrated with biblical truth to produce real change in the lives of God's people. The writings of Jay Adams, Paul Tripp, John MacArthur and Wayne Mack were prominent in the founding of this program.

Initially, the program utilized video lectures by Jim Newheiser from the Institute of Biblical Counseling and Discipleship (IBCD) in Escondido, California. These lectures, entitled "The Basics of Biblical Counseling" emphasized the sufficiency of Scripture to address the problems of life. The program was founded upon the conviction that counseling is an essential ministry of the local church. The ministry of counseling comes alongside the preaching of God's Word to impart biblical truth to the members of the church. Paul tells the church in Romans 15:14, "I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another." Counseling takes the same truths preached to God's people on a Sunday morning and speaks them into people's lives on a daily basis. Every believer can pursue a ministry of counseling because every believer has the Word of God. When believers are equipped to speak the Word of God to one another in the context of everyday life, the spiritual health of the church is promoted.

The biblical counseling program at Kindred Community Church was designed to train certified biblical counselors in partnership with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). The curriculum was planned as a three-year course of study which would meet or exceed ACBC standards for certification. The biblical counseling ministry at Kindred was not officially recognized as an ACBC Certified Training Center until October 2018. However, during the years 2011-2017, the program utilized ACBC approved training materials to equip trainees in accordance with the ACBC certification process. Trainees completed 30 hours of video instruction, observed 10 hours of counseling practice, read 1,000 pages of material related to theology and counseling, and completed 44 essays of at least one page in length. In the last phase of the program, the trainees engaged in 50 actual counseling sessions under the supervision of an ACBC Fellow. The entire training program was designed to be implemented under the supervision and authority of the elders of Kindred Community Church. The envisioned goal was to immediately benefit the body life of the church through the actual counseling ministry resulting from the training.

In 2016, the biblical counseling training program at Kindred graduated its first two certified counselors who completed the curriculum. These two counselors were recognized at the ACBC National Conference at College Park Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, held in October 2016. Three additional counselors graduated from the program in 2017, and were presented at the ACBC National Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, in October 2017. Two additional counselors graduated in 2019 and were affirmed at the ACBC National Conference in Memphis, Tennessee, in October 2019. To put these numbers in perspective, it must be noted that in 2016, only four certified biblical counselors were listed on the ACBC website for all of Orange County, California. The biblical counseling program is beginning to bear fruit. However, the ministry is still in its infant stages and needs continued advancement and maturity.

In 2018, Kindred Community Church was officially recognized as an ACBC Certified Training Center at the ACBC National Conference held in Southlake, Texas. According to ACBC policy, this provisional certification will last for two years. The Training Center remains a ministry of Kindred Community Church and is accountable to the by-laws and doctrinal statement of Kindred Church. Certification as an ACBC Training Center brings many benefits to the biblical counseling program at Kindred and will promote a greater level of accountability with ACBC. It will encourage the continued pursuit of excellence in the training of counselors and allow Kindred to partner with like-minded churches to train biblical counselors in Orange County.

The Need for Specialized Training for Biblical Counselors

From 2011 to 2018, the biblical counseling training program at Kindred utilized the video lecture series provided by the Biblical Counseling and Discipleship Association of Southern California (BCDASoCal). Thirty hours of instruction in biblical counseling are provided through this association and are approved as an ACBC Basic Training Course. The class topics are similar to the material covered by Newheiser in the IBCD lectures. BCDASoCal features teaching by professors of the Biblical Counseling Department of the Master's College, including John Street, Robert Somerville, Ernie Baker, and Wayne Johnston. The material includes a basic introduction to biblical counseling and an overview of how people change in the process of sanctification. In this lecture series, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is contrasted with the thinking of integrationist counseling. A biblical model of progressive sanctification is articulated. Biblical truths are applied to specific problems such as fear, anger, worry, depression, suffering, and forgiveness. Additional training is given addressing marital topics and the responsibility of parents toward their children. The material serves as an excellent foundation for the training of biblical counselors and has been well received by the trainees at Kindred Community Church.

In 2019, a new biblical counseling curriculum introduced at Kindred Church was approved by ACBC as the 30-hour Basic Training Course. I designed this curriculum and it is entitled “Introduction to Biblical Counseling.” I developed this course in accordance with ACBC standards and covered similar topics to the BCDASoCal lecture series. This thirty-hour Basic Training course covered the foundations and methods of biblical counseling as well as applications to specific life situations such as anger, anxiety, fear, depression, and conflict resolution. Case studies illustrated the concepts being taught in the course. The entire course was taught live in an intensive seminar format on January 8-11, 2019, with 30 people in attendance. The course was also taught live in a Saturday morning class, which met from January to November in 2019 with over 95 people enrolled in the class.

While the BCDASoCal materials and the “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” Basic Training Course serve as a solid foundation for the training of biblical counselors, they do not address the specific problems faced by many middle-aged believers. This is not a criticism or assignment of failure on the part of the introductory training courses. It is simply an admission that only so much can be covered in the framework of a thirty-hour lecture series. Middle-age believers deal with specific issues such as enduring chronic illness, ministering to aging parents, transitioning to an “empty nest,” and parenting adult children. Other issues encountered in this life-stage include dealing with “midlife crisis,” encountering prolonged infertility, experiencing divorce and remarriage, and processing grief over the loss of loved ones. A quick survey of the membership at Kindred Church would indicate that many middle-aged believers are dealing with issues such as these. While the principles covered in the thirty-hour lecture series serve as a foundation to minister to this population, additional training is necessary if counselors are to reach their maximum potential in service to believers in the body of Christ.

Rationale

Kindred Community Church records its church membership through the online database Church Community Builder (CCB). As of July 10, 2017,¹ CCB records indicated that 1,039 active adult believers were on the membership roll at Kindred. An additional inquiry through CCB indicated that 402 adult believers fell into the category of being over 44 years of age but below 66 years of age. This would indicate that approximately 39 percent of Kindred's adult membership can be classified in the category of "middle-aged."² Adults in this age group face unique challenges and struggles specific to this stage in life. It is the desire of the biblical counseling program at the church to serve this population by applying the Word of God to these distinct issues.

Compounding the need for this type of specialized training is the lack of biblically-sound resources pointedly addressing the struggles of the middle-aged believer in Christ. While a number of resources written from a biblical counseling perspective addressing the heart issues are universal to man, relatively few resources are devoted to applying those themes to the unique problems of this crucial age group. One illustration of this deficiency can be seen in a survey of material developed on the subject of marriage. While a number of resources written from a biblical counseling perspective help a young couple gain a solid foundation for their marriage, fewer resources address the struggles of an older married couple in the church. Typically, couples who have been married for over twenty years are wrestling with issues that are different from those of a newlywed. Older married couples may deal with issues such as how to care for aging parents, how to

¹ This analysis was performed in 2017, in the initial stages of the ministry project, to gain a basic assessment of the demographics of the church's membership. The membership roll at Kindred has continued to grow in the years 2017-2020.

² The classification "middle aged" is variously defined by secular psychologists. John G. Howells defines middle age to be "the phase of life experience following young adulthood and preceding old age—between 40 and 65 years approximately." John Howells, ed., *Modern Perspectives in the Psychiatry of Middle Age* (New York: Bruner/Mazel, 1981), v. Daniel J. Levinson defines "Middle Adulthood" to begin at age 40, with the period 40 to 45 years of age being considered "The Mid-Life Transition." Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 23. For the purposes of this project, the term "middle-age" refers those who are over 44 years old and below 66 years of age.

transition to an “empty nest,” how to relate to adult children, and how to combat stagnation and complacency in marriage. A younger married couple must be taught to “leave” their parents in accordance with Genesis 2:24. However, an older married couple may find that in these later years their aging parents are now moving in to live with them (1 Tim 5:8). Some difficult decisions need to be made in this season of life, and few written materials address the need from a biblical counseling perspective. Therefore, not only is there a lack of specialized training in the counseling program at Kindred Community Church, but a lack of ready-made resources would also compensate for this deficiency. The combination leaves the biblical counseling ministry at Kindred ill-equipped to minister to this large segment of the church’s membership.

The focus of this ministry project was to develop a twelve-hour training program that takes the principles of God’s Word and applies them to the issues facing middle-aged believers in Christ. This training program is built upon the current thirty-hour lecture series entitled “Introduction to Biblical Counseling,” which is part of the ACBC certification process at Kindred Community Church. This new curriculum would give counselors at Kindred the practical tools they need to minister effectively in actual counseling situations. The program is grounded in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The aim of this project was the mobilization of trained counselors who would be able to compassionately and biblically minister to the middle-aged population of Kindred Church. This project serves to further the mission of Kindred Community Church, which is “to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers.

Goals

The project envisioned to meet the following four goals to equip counselors to meet the needs of the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church:

1. The first goal was to discover the current issues being experienced by the middle-aged members of Kindred Community Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a twelve-session curriculum to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers.
3. The third goal was to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a mobilization plan for each participant to apply the training material in counseling ministry.

The success of this ministry project was determined by using a clearly defined research methodology. Each of the four goals of this project were evaluated using a defined means of measurement and specific benchmarks of success. If the project met these goals it would help achieve the mission statement of Kindred Community Church, which is to “make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Research Methodology

The first goal was to discover the current issues being experienced by the middle-aged members of Kindred Community Church. This goal was measured by administering a survey³ to all members of the church who are over 44 years of age but below 66 years of age.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when 100 individuals completed the survey⁵ and the data was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the most common struggles among this age group. This goal was then further measured by conducting in-person interviews of a sample drawn from this age group. The interviews

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

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ As of June 27, 2019, 400 members of Kindred Community Church were in this age range.

were semi-structured in nature and addressed the experiences of people dealing with the struggles identified. This goal was considered successfully met when 15 people from this age group were interviewed. The data from the interviews were analyzed for common themes yielding a clearer understanding of the struggles among this cohort.⁶

The second goal was to develop a twelve-session curriculum to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers. Eight sessions addressed specific counseling issues identified from the aforementioned survey and interviews. Four sessions within the curriculum were interactive in nature. Class participants applied the material learned by practicing their skills in role play scenarios. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and practical usefulness of the curriculum.⁷ The expert panel consisted of four members who are either ordained pastors or counselors are certified by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers. The twelve-part curriculum was implemented in the church and taught in a live, interactive class setting. Participants were invited from the current group of members who were formally part of the biblical counseling training program at Kindred. The class size envisioned was no less than 10 students but no more than 15. A requirement for this course was that participants either attend all twelve sessions or complete the equivalent material through audio recordings and make-up sessions. A pre- and post-survey was administered to measure the biblical counselor's level of knowledge and competence in addressing issues specific to middle-

⁶ See appendix 2.

⁷ See appendix 3.

aged believers.⁸ This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test⁹ for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. The *t*-test was selected for this analysis because it compares the means of the scores of the pre-test and post-test. This allowed me to measure the difference in biblical knowledge and counseling skill that occurred during the curriculum's implementation. Additionally, I observed students practicing their counseling skills in role play scenarios and determined their level of competency utilizing an evaluation rubric.¹⁰ This goal was considered successfully met when at least 90 percent of the students score at the sufficient or above level on the evaluation rubric. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the role play scenarios were repeated until the competency standard is achieved.

The fourth goal was to develop a mobilization plan for each participant to apply the training material in counseling ministry. This plan was designed in consultation with class participants and applied the material in both structured and informal ministry contexts. Those who were actively counseling as part of the biblical counseling ministry at Kindred Community Church utilized their training in organized counseling sessions. Class participants who were not formally counseling as part of the biblical counseling ministry developed a plan to utilize the content of their training in informal relationships and other shepherding opportunities that exist within the church. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan and its practical application to the spiritual life of the church.¹¹ The expert panel consisted of three members who are either ordained pastors or counselors are certified by the

⁸ See appendix 5.

⁹ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 217.

¹⁰ See appendix 10.

¹¹ See appendix 13.

Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Biblical counseling. *Biblical counseling* is the ministry of God’s Word in the local church in which believers speak and apply the truths of Scripture to one another. Robert Kelleman writes that *biblical counseling* “depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s Word to suffering and sin by speaking and living God’s truth in love to equip people to love God and one another.”¹² The goal of biblical counseling is life change to the glory of God. For the purposes of this project, *biblical counselor* is used to describe any believer who comes alongside another person for the sake of ministering and applying the written Scriptures.

Middle-aged. For the purposes of this project, *middle-aged* is used to refer to the age group over 44 years of age but below 66 years of age.

Sufficiency of Scripture. The *sufficiency of Scripture* is the conviction that the sixty-six books of the Bible are all that the believer needs to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (2 Tim 3:16-17). Wayne Grudem writes, “The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.”¹³ When applied to counseling ministry, this conviction holds that the truths of the Bible do not need to be integrated with the ideas of secular psychology to produce real change in the life of a believer.

¹² Robert W. Kelleman, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church* (Philipsburg: P & R, 2011), 36.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 127.

Scripture alone contains the truth of God, and this truth is sufficient to save and sanctify (John 17:17).

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, this project was limited in terms of duration to twenty-four weeks. This timeframe included surveying and interviewing middle-aged members of Kindred, developing curriculum, implementing the curriculum in a class setting and developing a mobilization plan for counseling. Within this timeframe, the classroom instruction period was limited to twelve weeks. Evaluating the long-term effects of the implementation of this training is beyond the scope of this ministry project.

Second, the population for this project was middle-aged believers who are members of Kindred Community Church in Anaheim Hills, California. The members of this church have been publicly identified through a clearly defined membership process¹⁴ and are distinct from those who merely attend or are visitors to the church. The membership at Kindred largely live in the Orange County area of Southern California. Therefore, the specific issues drawn from this population group may not be representative of the middle-age population of the state of California or the United States as a whole.

Conclusion

Biblical counseling takes the truths of God's Word and applies them to the issues and problems people face. Middle-aged believers in the church need the truths of Scripture applied to their unique life struggles. It is consistent with the mission statement of Kindred Community Church to train biblical counselors to minister to this age group. The following chapter will articulate the biblical and theological basis for this project.

¹⁴ There is a clear distinction between members and non-members at Kindred Community Church. Each member has received four hours of class instruction on the basics of church membership, has been baptized via immersion, and has been interviewed by an elder of the church. The purpose of the membership interview is to confirm a basic understanding of the gospel and salvation testimony. New members at Kindred are affirmed publicly at the end of a Sunday morning service. New member affirmations occur three times a year.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A TRAINING PROGRAM TO EQUIP COUNSELORS TO ADDRESS ISSUES SPECIFIC TO MIDDLE-AGED BELIEVERS

Believers in the age group defined as “middle-aged” typically deal with unique challenges and problems that are specific to this stage in life. While caution must be taken not to overgeneralize the experiences of any age group, it can be observed that middle-aged believers tend to deal with any number of the following issues: caring for aging parents, dealing with “midlife crisis,” transitioning to the “empty nest,” parenting adult children, and experiencing the physical limitations which are typical of older age. The theological principle which is the foundation for this project is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). God has not left the believer in Christ without a sufficient resource to handle life’s problems. A careful examination of five key biblical passages will substantiate the view that the Scriptures are sufficient to equip the middle-aged believer in Christ. In light of the sufficient resource that God has given to the believer in Scripture, a training program that equips biblical counselors to minister to middle-aged believers is theologically warranted and biblically justified.

Psalm 19:7-9

Psalm 19:7-9 is a vivid description of Scripture’s ability to transform a person’s life. In this passage, the power of the written Word of God is described as having the ability to change a person’s thinking, emotions, and conduct. This supports the assertion

that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of a middle-aged believer in Christ. Far from merely addressing external behavior, Scripture is able to change the “heart” (Ps 19:8) which is the place from which “flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23).

The first half of Psalm 19 (vv. 1-7) is a presentation of God’s revelation in creation. This revelation is not subtle nor restrained: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (v. 1). Hans-Joachim Kraus explains that the term *glory* (כבוד) “semantically contains the notion of weightiness, or weighty prestige (*gravitas*).”¹ Peter Craigie comments, “As mankind reflects upon the vast expanse of heaven, with its light by day and its intimation of a greater universe by night, that reflection may open up an awareness and knowledge of God, the Creator, who by his hands created a glory beyond the comprehension of the human mind.”² In verse 2, the verb יביע is translated as “pours out.” Kraus observes that the term denotes “ecstatic, bubbling, excited speech . . . [describing] the hymn of the heavens in vv.1 and 2.”³ The audience of God’s revelation in creation is universal in scope: “Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (v. 4).

In what has been called a “sudden transition,”⁴ Psalm 19:7 turns from the subject of God’s general revelation in creation to God’s specific revelation in the written Scriptures. Six synonyms are used to describe the written Word of God in verses 7-9. They are law (תורה), statutes (עדות), precepts (פקוד), commandment (מצוה), fear (יראה), and rules (משפט). Willem VanGemeren writes, “The synonyms are not to be studied in abstraction but give a comprehensive emphasis that all of the words of the Lord are

¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 270.

² Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, rev. ed. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 180.

³ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 270.

⁴ John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 290.

beneficial.”⁵ James Mays makes the additional comment that, of the six terms used in verses 7-9, four “of the six are single, two are plural, indicating that the poet thinks of *torah* as a comprehensive entity that is present also in particular precepts and legal sentences.”⁶ Used together, these six terms emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of Holy Scripture and the truth that the written Word of God speaks with divine authority.

The phrase “of the LORD” is repeated six times in verses 7-9 and emphasizes the personal nature of Scripture as well as its authoritative place in the life of the believer. In contrast to the name אֱל used in verses 1-7, the name “LORD” translates the name יהוה. James Boice explains that יהוה is “the covenant name revealed to Moses at the burning bush.”⁷ The Scriptures are God’s personal revelation of himself which are meant to lead to a personal relationship. Craigie writes, “The glories of nature indicate God (אֱל v 2) in general terms, whereas the glories of the Torah reveal the *Lord* (יהוה, vv 8-10), that is, the God who has revealed himself to his people by name in redemption and covenant.”⁸ Therefore, the written Word of God reveals more than the general truths communicated in creation. The Scriptures speak of God’s specific attributes such as His love (Ps 63:3) and His mercy (Ps 69:16), as well as His personal dealings with the nations and with Israel. Indeed, if the fullness of New Testament revelation is considered, the Scriptures communicate the nature of God as a holy Trinity (Matt 28:19) and the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). General revelation is sufficient to leave men condemned “without excuse” (Rom 1:20). In contrast, God’s written revelation is sufficient to save.

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 181.

⁶ James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 99.

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 1:170.

⁸ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 182.

Six terms are used to describe the written revelation of God in the written Scriptures. The Scriptures are “perfect” (המים), “sure” (אמן), “right” (ישר), “pure” (בר), “clean” (טהור) and “true” (אמה). The term *perfect* (המים) is worthy of careful consideration. Kraus observes that the word המים “is properly a term belonging to the language of sacrifices. The flawless, spotless animal is called המים.”⁹ Franz Delitzsch explains that the usage of the term המים describes Scripture as “absolutely well-meaning, and altogether directed towards the well-being of man.”¹⁰ Thus, the quality of Scripture is directly related to the character of God himself. VanGemen writes, “God’s written revelation manifests a perfect internal harmony between God and his Word.”¹¹ Because God’s ways are perfect (Deut 32:4), His Word is also perfect. Psalm 12:6 states, “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”

The written Scriptures have a powerful impact upon the believer’s life. Verses 7-9 list four of these beneficial effects. It “revives the soul” (v. 7a), “makes wise the simple” (v. 7b), “rejoices the heart” (v. 8a), “enlightens the eyes” (v. 8b). The passage then lists two attributes of the Scripture that ought to be extolled: it “endures forever” (v. 9a) and is “righteous altogether” (v. 9b). In contrast to God’s general revelation in creation, God’s special revelation in Scripture has the power to address the “soul” (נפש). John MacArthur explains that the term נפש describes “the inner person, the whole person, the real you.”¹² According to Delitzsch, the term *revive* (שיב) in verse 7 has reference to the “imparting [of] newness of life, quickening the soul.”¹³ Craigie thus describes Scripture as “the fundamental force, restoring to full vigor and vitality the flagging spirit of mankind,

⁹ Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 274.

¹⁰ Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, trans. Francis Bolton (1866-91; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 178.

¹¹ VanGemen, *Psalms*, 182.

¹² John MacArthur, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 168.

¹³ Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 178.

and providing him with the enduring inner food without which life cannot be fully lived.”¹⁴

Proverbs 1:1-7

Proverbs 1:1-7 is an invitation for the simple to obtain wisdom. Biblical wisdom is depicted as the ability to live skillfully, applying God’s truth to the issues of life. The invitation to learn wisdom is extended to people of all ages and at all levels of spiritual maturity. This passage supports the assertion that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of the middle-aged believer in Christ.

Proverbs 1:1-7 serves as the introduction to the book of Proverbs and clearly states the book’s author, purpose, and theological foundation. The opening verse is a superscription that identifies the author as “Solomon, son of David, king of Israel” (1:1). First Kings 4:29-30 states, “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure . . . so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.” The book of Proverbs is divinely inspired (2 Tim 3:16-17) and therefore it is profitable for life and godliness.

A series of infinitives in verses 2-4 communicate the purpose of the book: “To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth” (1:2-4). The intended audience of the book is identified in verse 4 as “the simple.” Andrew Steinmann explains that the term פתי in the Hebrew describes a “gullible, naïve person”¹⁵ who is “open to the influences of other fools and can easily be deceived and misled.”¹⁶ An additional term used in verse 4 describes the target audience as “the youth” (נוער). Michael V. Fox observes that the term

¹⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 182.

¹⁵ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 54.

¹⁶ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 30.

נער is “used of young people . . . into early adulthood.”¹⁷ However, the term can be used in a more general sense to describe those who are spiritually immature.¹⁸

While the book of Proverbs was written to impart wisdom to the simple, it was also written to increase the understanding of the wise. Proverbs 1:5 states, “Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.” The contents of this book can be read with great profit by people at diverse levels of spiritual maturity. The wise person is called to “pay attention”¹⁹ to wisdom, with the promise that he will “increase in learning” (1:5). Proverbs 9:9 says, “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.” Wisdom can be applied to diverse stations in life. Thomas Perowne explains, “Its precepts follow man into all the details of his daily occupation, and into all the relations of his common life. Wisdom is the friend and counsellor alike of the monarch on the throne, of the artisan in the workshop, and of the husbandman in the field.”²⁰

The value of pursuing wisdom is attested to by the number of Hebrew terms that describe *wisdom* in Proverbs 1:1-7. No less than nine Hebrew words are used as synonyms of wisdom in this passage. The first term, חכמה (1:2), is the most general term translated “wisdom” and “conveys the idea of skill.”²¹ In Exodus 31:3, the word was used to describe Bezalel’s ability to craft the elements of the Tabernacle. Wisdom is not merely the accumulation of intellectual knowledge. Instead, Steinmann explains that it is

¹⁷ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 18a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 62.

¹⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 97.

¹⁹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 62.

²⁰ Thomas Thomason Perowne, *The Proverbs* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1899), 13.

²¹ John E. Johnson, “An Analysis of Proverbs 1:1-7,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 576 (1987): 425.

the “knowledge *and* ability to apply what one knows.”²² John E. Johnson comments, “Proverbs aims to show a person how to become adroit at the greatest skill of all, the skill of living.”²³

The second term, מוסר (1:2, 1:3, 1:7), can be translated “instruction” and carries the idea of “correction” or “discipline.” Fox writes, “*Musar* basically means ‘correction,’ whether verbal or physical. It is sometimes ‘preemptive’ correction and means ‘warning,’ ‘admonition.’”²⁴ The term is used elsewhere in reference to the discipline of the LORD: “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline (מוסר) or be weary of his reproof” (Prov 3:11). William McKane observes, “It is to be associated with the demand for receptivity in the pupil (cf. v.5) and for submission to the authority of the teacher.”²⁵ The promise is that the מוסר of the LORD brings life: “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline (מוסר) are the way of life” (Prov 6:23).

The third term, בינה (1:3), is translated as “insight” and carries the idea of “discernment” or “perception.” Johnson explains, “The person who is truly wise is able to separate, to discriminate, to read between the lines.”²⁶ At the most basic level, the wise man is able to discern the way of the good against the way of the wicked (Prov 1:15, 2:8, 12, 20, 3:23, 4:11, 4:14, 4:19). However, as Fox clarifies, “*Binah* includes reason, the intellectual faculty used in solving problems and deducing truths, as well as intellect, the ability to comprehend meanings and perceive relations and causes.”²⁷ “Insight” (בינה) is closely related to “prudence” (ארום) and includes the ability to understand the consequences of one’s actions (Prov 10:5, 13:16, 14:8, 14:15). The phrase “words of insight” (אמרי בינה)

²² Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 25.

²³ Johnson, “An Analysis of Proverbs 1:1-7,” 425.

²⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 59.

²⁵ William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 263-64.

²⁶ Johnson, “An Analysis of Proverbs 1:1-7,” 426.

²⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 30.

contains the idea that this type of discernment can be communicated and learned (Prov 4:1, 4:5, 4:7). To be instructed in this way is to receive an education that is more precious than gold (Prov 16:16).

“Wise dealing” (שכל), “prudence” (ערמה) and “discretion” (מזמה) are the next three synonyms for wisdom used in this passage. Each of these words emphasizes intelligent and perceptive conduct in the everyday affairs of life. The word שכל (1:3) has been defined as the “discipline for acting sensibly.”²⁸ One can see how a wise man acting with שכל would facilitate the “successful treatment of a particular situation.”²⁹ Steinmann explains that the term translated “prudence” (ערמה) in 1:4 describes the ability to have “insight into a situation so that one can determine the proper course of action.”³⁰ It carries more than the idea of a cautious approach to life. Indeed, Fox comments that the quality of prudence is “the ability to devise clever, even wily, tactics for attaining one’s goals.”³¹ In Joshua 9:4, the same word is translated as “cunning” (ESV) and describes the actions of the Gibeonites to disguise their true identity from the Israelites. According to Tremper Longman, the term “discretion” (מזמה) is a noun “formed from the verb *zmm*, ‘to think, plan, purpose, devise.’”³² The word describes the ability to make wise plans for the future. Perhaps, as Fox suggests, the term “shrewdness” would best capture the meaning of ערמה in a positive moral sense.³³ Indeed, the book of Proverbs commends wise planning as long as those plans are made in dependence upon the LORD (Prov 16:1, 16:3).

The final three synonyms for wisdom are the terms “learning” (לקח), “guidance”

²⁸ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 52.

²⁹ Longman, *Proverbs*, 96.

³⁰ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 52.

³¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 61.

³² Longman, *Proverbs*, 97.

³³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 61.

(תחבילה) and “knowledge” (דעת). The word “learning” (לקח) literally means “what is received,”³⁴ and emphasizes the truth that wisdom is gained by listening to the teaching of the wise (Prov 9:9, 16:21, 16:23). “Guidance” (תחבילה) refers to the ability to formulate a plan of action that leads to success³⁵ and is an indispensable skill for godly living (Prov 11:14, 20:28, 24:6). The final word, “knowledge” (דעת), is a general word which occurs thirty-nine times in the Proverbs.³⁶ Longman explains, “The word is so general that really the only distinctive thing to remark about it is that it probably implies a relationship with the object that is known.”³⁷ Indeed, true “knowledge” (דעת) cannot be obtained without a relationship with the LORD. Proverbs 1:7 summarizes the theme of the book of Proverbs in the following way: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 1:7 has been called “The Motto”³⁸ of the book of Proverbs because the phrase “fear of the LORD” occurs fourteen times throughout the book.³⁹ Longman notes that the term “fear” (יראה) has “a semantic range that goes from what might be called ‘respect’ or ‘awe’ to ‘utter terror.’”⁴⁰ While Steinmann concedes that the word can be used to “denote fear of God’s wrath,” he also observes that the phrase “the fear of the LORD” is often used in Scripture to describe a “filial relationship to God through faith that causes a person to want to please the heavenly Father.”⁴¹ Proverbs 1:7 states that this reverent attitude toward the LORD is the “beginning of knowledge.” According to

³⁴ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 53.

³⁵ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 27.

³⁶ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 25.

³⁷ Longman, *Proverbs*, 97.

³⁸ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 67.

³⁹ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 27.

⁴⁰ Longman, *Proverbs*, 101.

⁴¹ Steinmann, *Proverbs*, 28.

Longman, the term “beginning” (ראשיתה) used in 1:7 has the sense “not only of ‘first’ but also of foundation or even source.”⁴² The invitation to gain wisdom is an invitation to draw near to the LORD. There is no skillful living apart from a relationship with him. The Bible offers what secular counsel is unable to give: a life lived with skill, discretion and discernment which is founded upon the worship of the one true God.

Second Timothy 3:14-17

Second Timothy 3:14-17 is a testimony both to the origin and the usefulness of Scripture. This passage explains the four ways that the written Word of God can practically be applied to life. The passage culminates in a claim as to the scope of Scripture’s comprehensive content. This passage supports the claim that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of a middle-aged believer in Christ.

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is set in the context of many false teachers who are propagating theological errors. Paul has these false teachers in mind when he says in 2 Timothy 3:13, “evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” In verse 14, Paul draws an emphatic contrast between the path of the false teachers and the course that Timothy is to follow. George Knight explains that the phrase “But as for you” (συ δε) “places Timothy and what he should do in sharp contrast with the progressive error of the false teachers.”⁴³ Paul had previously warned Timothy that there would be men who “oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the truth” (2 Tim 3:8). Timothy is to follow a different path in life: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (2 Tim 3:14).

The term “continue” (μενε) can be translated to “remain” and is a present

⁴² Longman, *Proverbs*, 101.

⁴³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 442.

imperative, calling for a life of “daily steadfastness.”⁴⁴ Timothy is to be motivated by his personal conviction of the truth: he has not only “learned” the truth,” but also “firmly believed” it (2 Tim 3:14). The phrase “knowing from whom you learned it” (3:14) calls Timothy to remember those who have faithfully taught him. Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, would be included in this reference (1:5). The apostle Paul would be included as well. J. N. D. Kelly comments, “These truths of the Christian tradition have been imparted to him, not by clever individualist adventurers whom nobody can vouch for but themselves, but by people like his mother and grandmother (cf. 1.5), [and] the Apostle himself.”⁴⁵

Timothy’s understanding of the truth was rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul refers to the Old Testament as “the sacred writings” (τα ιερα γραμματα). Kelly explains that “Paul means, of course, the O.T.; there is abundant evidence that this was a stock designation for it in Greek-speaking Judaism (cf. Philo and Josephus).”⁴⁶ William Mounce agrees: “There is sufficient evidence in early Jewish literature that the anarthrous plural was a technical expression for the Hebrew Scripture.”⁴⁷ Timothy had learned the Old Testament Scriptures “from childhood” (2 Tim 3:15). The word βρεφος is a general term that can refer to infancy or to early childhood. George Knight observes, “The Mishnah tractate *Pirke Aboth* (5:21), from the end of the first century AD, gives five years of age as the time that a Jewish child is fit for scripture.”⁴⁸

Paul asserts the power of the written Scriptures in the statement: “the sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). Knight explains that

⁴⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 562.

⁴⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Harper’s New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 200-201.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 201.

⁴⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 563.

⁴⁸ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 443.

the term σωτηρια is “used in the NT of the spiritual deliverance from bondage to sin that Christ brings.”⁴⁹ The Old Testament prophesied of the coming Messiah who would save His people from their sins (Isa 53:3-5). These prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ (Matt 1:21). When Paul mentions the power of the Old Testament to bring salvation, he explains that the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ: “The sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Christ is the theme of the Old Testament Scriptures; the Old Testament prophecies find their fulfillment in him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39-40; 1 Cor 15:3-4).

Paul’s reflection on the power of the Old Testament Scriptures leads him to make a general statement on the origin of Scripture. Verse 16 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” The term γραφη is the common New Testament term used in reference to the written Word of God. It is commonly used to describe the Old Testament writings (Matt 21:42, Luke 4:21, Rom 4:3). γραφη is also used to refer to the New Testament Scriptures which were already recognized as having divine authority. In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul says, “For the Scripture (γραφη) says . . .” and then he goes on to quote Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7. Paul Enns asserts, “It can be argued that Paul was using the designation ‘Scripture’ not only for the Old Testament but also for the portions of the New Testament that had been written by that time.”⁵⁰ Mounce’s comments reinforce this idea: “Since the early church viewed the words of Jesus as fully authoritative, it would not have been a large step for the early Christians to accept the writings of his apostles as equally authoritative with the OT . . . [and] the door is open to enlarge the parameters of γραφη.”⁵¹

Paul’s assertion is that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). The term πας can either have the sense of “all” or “every” but it is more likely that “all” is the

⁴⁹ Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 444.

⁵⁰ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 167.

⁵¹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 568.

meaning it this passage.⁵² The Scripture is being viewed as a collective whole. The phrase “breathed out by God” translates the Greek term θεοπνευστος. Knight explains that this word is “a compound of the word for God, θεος, and the verb ‘breathe,’ πνεω. . . . The word may be properly rendered ‘God-breathed.’”⁵³ The basic idea is that Scripture comes from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4). Enns writes,

Since Scripture is God-breathed, it emphasizes that the origin of Scripture is God. This is consistent with the Old Testament Prophets who received their messages from the mouth of God . . . just as the word given to the prophets was trustworthy and reliable, so the Scriptures, which are God-breathed, are trustworthy and accurate because both communications come from the mouth of God.⁵⁴

Knight comments, “Paul appears to be saying, therefore, that all scripture has as its source God’s breath and that is its essential characteristic. This is another way of saying that scripture is God’s word.”⁵⁵ The origin of Scripture, properly understood, leads to a proper understanding of the quality of Scripture. Because the Scripture is the very word of God, it is true (John 17:17), trustworthy (Ps 111:7), pure (Ps 12:6), powerful (Heb 4:12), and eternal (Isa 40:8). The written Scripture stands in sharp contrast to the demonic origin of the ideas propagated by false teachers (1 Tim 4:1). Scripture is the believer’s daily nourishment (Matt 4:4, 1 Pet 2:3) and the focus of the minister’s ministry (1 Tim 4:15; 2 Tim 4:2). Timothy is to “continue” or to “remain” in the path of faithfulness to God’s Word and not to be swayed by those who are teaching error (2 Tim 3:14).

Because all Scripture is God-breathed, it is therefore “profitable.” Knight explains that the word ωφελιμος has the meaning of being “useful . . . in the sense of yielding a practical benefit.”⁵⁶ The four-fold utility of the written Word of God is

⁵² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566.

⁵³ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 446.

⁵⁴ Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 166-67.

⁵⁵ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 447.

⁵⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

explained in the phrases: “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:16). Mounce observes that the “four prepositional phrases may form two groups, the first dealing with doctrine (“orthodoxy”) and the second with behavior (“orthopraxy”).”⁵⁷ Scripture both promotes sound doctrine and godly living and corrects those who deviate from its teaching. Philip Towner explains that the term “teaching” (διδασκαλία) can be defined as “instruction in doctrine and matters of Christian conduct.”⁵⁸ “Reproof” (ελεγχος) is closely related to the idea of “rebuke” and is one of the duties of the faithful preacher of God’s Word (2 Tim 4:2). According to Kelly, the word “correction” (επανορθωσις) carries the idea of “convincing the misguided of their errors and setting them on the right path again;”⁵⁹ “Training in righteousness” (παιδειαν την εν δικαιοσυνη) refers to an educational process where “right conduct”⁶⁰ will be the desired end goal.

Verse 17 explains the purpose of Scripture’s inspiration: “That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Mounce comments that “V 17 is not an afterthought tagged on to show the result of v.16b. ινα, ‘in order that’ introduces the ultimate purpose of Scripture’s inspiration.”⁶¹ God inspired (lit. “breathed-out”) His written word so that “the man of God may be complete” (3:17). The word αρτιος is translated as “perfect” in the KJV and can be translated as “capable, proficient . . . able to meet all demands.”⁶² While the term “man of God” (v. 17; 1 Tim 6:11) can have special reference to Timothy as a spiritual leader, the principle in verse 17 can be applied to any believer in

⁵⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

⁵⁸ Philip Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 201.

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 203.

⁶⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

⁶¹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

⁶² Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 450.

possession of the Holy Scripture. The believer is equipped for “every” good work. The term *πας* is comprehensive in nature and includes everything that is necessary for the Christian to have right doctrine and right conduct. The Scriptures are not only powerful; they are sufficient for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3-4).

Hebrews 4:12-13

Hebrews 4:12-13 is a description of the Scripture’s penetrating power. The Bible deals with men at a far deeper level than any philosophies or man-made systems of thought. The Word of God is able to address the issues in men’s hearts. This supports the assertion that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of a middle-aged believer in Christ.

Hebrews 4:12-13 is the conclusion to one of the warning passages in the book of Hebrews (3:7–4:13). This warning passage supports one of the major themes of the epistle, which is to “warn Jewish-Christian readers against apostatizing to their former Judaism.”⁶³ In this passage, the author exhorts the visible church against the dangers of falling away from the living God (3:12). Of particular concern is the prospect that there would be any among the assembly who would be hardened in heart (3:7, 15). The warning passage is built around a quotation from Psalm 95:7-11, which is an account of Israel’s unbelief in the wilderness. Hebrews 4:12-13 forms a fitting conclusion to the larger passage (3:7-4:13) as it gives caution against the dangers of neglecting God’s Word. In the words of William Lane, “Those who remain insensitive to the voice of God in Scripture may discover that God’s word is also a lethal weapon. . . . The word of God poses a judgment that is more threatening and sharper than any double-edged sword.”⁶⁴

A major theme in the warning passage is the concept of “rest” (3:11, 18, 4:1, 3,

⁶³ Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 11.

⁶⁴ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1991), 102.

5, 8, 9, 10) and the danger of falling short of that rest (4:1, 11). In Psalm 95:11, the concept of rest is tied to the prospect of entering the Promised Land. Because of unbelief, the people of Israel failed to conquer the land and fell short of entering that rest (Num 14:20-23). Instead, an entire generation died in the wilderness (Josh 5:4). Just as the apostle Paul used the history of Israel as a warning against the dangers of idolatry (1 Cor 10:1-11), so the writer of Hebrews uses Psalm 95:7-11 as a warning against apostasy. F. F. Bruce observes, “The parallel between those Israelites and the people of God in the new age is impressive enough for the disaster which befell the former to serve as a warning to the latter.”⁶⁵ The danger of having a hardened heart is common to both the Old Testament and New Testament eras.

Commentators differ on whether the “rest” spoken of in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 is a present reality or a future promise. In favor of the “present reality” view is the statement in 4:3 that “we who have believed enter that rest.” Lane contends that the verb εἰσερχομεθα “implies more than proleptic enjoyment of what God has promised. The present tense of the verb is to be regarded as a true present and not simply viewed as future in reference.”⁶⁶ However, Paul Ellingworth argues that the verb εἰσερχομεθα can also communicate “an emphatic equivalent of the future tense, as often with verbs of movement.”⁶⁷ The wider context emphasizes the need for present perseverance in the midst of difficulty (3:6, 14) and the book of Hebrews emphasizes that the believer’s future eschatological salvation is a motivation for this endurance (Heb 1:14, 11:39-40). Because of this, the “future promise” view is preferable. Craig Koester agrees: “The promise remains in force and its fulfillment

⁶⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105.

⁶⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 99.

⁶⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 246.

will occur—but in the future. Therefore, their present stance must be one of endurance, not despair.”⁶⁸

The warning passage ends with a focus on “the word of God” (4:12). Some have interpreted the phrase ο λογος του θεου to be a reference to the Son of God. However, Ellingworth explains that the “Christological explanation has been generally abandoned since Calvin . . . [the view] has no support either in the immediate context here, nor in the epistle as a whole.”⁶⁹ As noted previously, the warning passage of Hebrews 3:7-4:13 is built upon the exhortation of Psalm 95:7-11 and references that passage repeatedly (Heb 3:7-11, 3:15, 4:3, 4:5, 4:7). The emphasis on the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures supports the conclusion that ο λογος του θεου in 4:12 refers to the written Scriptures, not the pre-incarnate Christ. Furthermore, as Leon Morris explains, “The comparison with a sharp sword and its penetration into human personality shows that it is not the incarnate Word that is in mind.”⁷⁰ In 3:7 the writer of Hebrews introduces Psalm 95:7-11 with the phrase, “the Holy Spirit says,” attributing the words of Scripture to the words of the Holy Spirit. The author of Hebrews’ reverence for the written Word of God is evidenced by how repeatedly this passage refers to the Old Testament Scripture. Lane observes, “Hebrews is impregnated with the OT. . . . Every chapter is marked by explicit or implicit references to the biblical text.”⁷¹

This written Word of God is described as being “living” in its nature (4:12). Ellingworth observes that “Ζων is emphatic by position”⁷² and is an echo of the phrase “the living God” just mentioned in 3:12. This description of the written Word of God is

⁶⁸ Craig Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 277.

⁶⁹ Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 261.

⁷⁰ Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 44.

⁷¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, cxv.

⁷² Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 261.

not unique to the book of Hebrews: Stephen spoke of the “living oracles” in Acts 7:38 and Peter spoke of the “living and abiding word of God” in 1 Peter 1:23.⁷³ Just as the spoken Word of God brought forth life in the creation (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26), so the written Word of God is dynamic in nature and is described in verse 12 as being ενεργης (“active”). Ellingworth comments that the term ενεργης means “effective, powerful.”⁷⁴ According to Bruce, the written Word of God “speeds to fulfil the purpose for which it has been uttered.”⁷⁵ God testifies to the active nature of His Word in Isaiah 55:11: “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

When verse 12 describes the Word of God as being “sharper than any two-edged sword,” the idea communicated is not one of comfort. In Revelation 13:10, the sword (μαχαира) is used as an instrument of judgment: “If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.” In Revelation 1:16, a different Greek term (ρομφαια) is used yet the imagery of the “two-edged sword” is retained: “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” Ellingworth explains, “In classical and modern Greek alike, ρομφαια is a large sword, while μαχαира is a knife or sabre. . . . This distinction virtually disappears in the LXX . . . both terms are associated with divine judgment.”⁷⁶ Lane agrees with this assessment: “When the past generation sought to contravene the oath of God and to enter Canaan, they were driven back and fell by the sword (μαχαира) of the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Num 14:43-45).”⁷⁷ The message is sobering: those who persevere will enter

⁷³ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 112.

⁷⁴ Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 261.

⁷⁵ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 112.

⁷⁶ Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 262.

⁷⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 102.

into God's rest (4:10-11); those who fall away will experience God's judgment (10:26-29).

This judgment will expose the reality of what is in man's heart. The written Word of God has a "piercing" quality. The verb διεισδυμενος means to "pierce, penetrate, go through."⁷⁸ Like a sharpened sword, the Word of God cuts through the externals and penetrates into the essential core of who man is. The writer of Hebrews uses "figurative"⁷⁹ language to underscore this truth. Andrew Davidson comments that "the idea of dividing the soul and spirit suggests the division of a body into its members, hence joints and marrow are attributed to them, expressing the subtle articulations of the spiritual being and the innermost nature and substance of it."⁸⁰ Koester adds, "The first two elements are the immaterial forces that animate a person; the last two have to do with the material aspects. Together, they summarize human existence."⁸¹ The writer's purpose is not to establish a clear borderline where a man's "soul" (ψυχη) ends and his "spirit" (πνευμα) begins. Rather, the language is meant to vividly depict Scripture's "piercing" ability to discern what is in the inner man. Bruce observes, "The word of God probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being."⁸² The Word of God penetrates to the deepest part of who man is.

Ellingworth notes that verse 13 is a transition where the "author moves smoothly from the word of God to God himself."⁸³ God's penetrating gaze sees all that is inside of man: "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (4:13). Throughout the warning

⁷⁸ Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 262.

⁷⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 103.

⁸⁰ Andrew Bruce Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882), 96.

⁸¹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 274.

⁸² Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 113.

⁸³ Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 264.

passage of 3:7–4:13, the problem of a hardened, unbelieving heart has been addressed (3:8, 12, 15). Donald Hagner observes, “It is worth wondering whether the readers contemplated some form of compromise that was meant to veil what was actually apostasy.”⁸⁴ Such persons are warned that the Word of God is able to expose hypocrisy. The warning passage of 3:7–4:13 ends on a sobering note. The foundation is thus laid for the audience to hear the good news of 4:14-16. There is a “great high priest” (4:14) who is able to “sympathize with our weaknesses” (4:15). The invitation is given that the believer can “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). The Scripture wounds and heals; convicts and restores. Such is the power of the living and active Word of God.

Second Peter 1:3-4

Second Peter 1:3-4 is a sweeping statement as to the comprehensive resources given to the believer in Christ. Both the source and the scope of God’s resources are described, as well as the application of those resources to the believer’s earthly life. This supports the assertion that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of a middle-aged believer in Christ.

The theme of 2 Peter is a warning against false teachers. The apostle Peter writes to believers who are being influenced by false teachers and calls them to not be carried away by “the error of lawless people” (3:17). The exact audience of this epistle is somewhat unclear. Peter Davids observes, “We have very little information about the recipients of 2 Peter.”⁸⁵ However, the salutation addresses the audience as “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). This statement indicates that the recipients were true believers in Christ. These believers were being unsettled by false teachers who were apparently denying the teaching of the Second Coming (3:4-10) and also advocating a licentious

⁸⁴ Hagner, *Hebrews*, 74.

⁸⁵ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 132.

lifestyle (2:2, 10, 13-14, 18-19). In the words of Gene Green, the “error of the heretics is doctrinal and not only moral. . . . This eschatological skepticism translates into an affirmation of liberty that throws off moral restraint.”⁸⁶ Peter writes this letter to reaffirm the doctrine of Christ’s return and call believers to a godly lifestyle.

A call to godly living is central to Peter’s purpose in writing this epistle. Genuine Christians must distinguish themselves from false apostates by actively pursuing godly virtues and character. They are to “make every effort” (1:5, 15) to pursue spiritual characteristics such as “virtue” (1:5), “knowledge” (1:6), “self-control” (1:6) and “steadfastness” (1:6). In light of the return of Jesus Christ to this earth, they are to pursue “lives of holiness and godliness” (3:11) so that they would be “found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (3:14). Douglas Moo writes, “Motivated by the Day of the Lord that is coming, believers should work hard to be found perfectly pure and blameless when God in Christ assesses our lives. They should strive to be the opposite of the false teachers, who are ‘blots and blemishes’ (2:13)”⁸⁷.

Peter’s opening section (1:3-11) is an exhortation to godly living and the ground of that exhortation is found in verses 3-4. God has given to the believer the spiritual resources to live a godly life. The believer has been given divine power of Christ (1:3). There is a question whether the pronoun “His” (αυτου) in verse 3 is a reference to God the Father or to Christ. Seeing that “Jesus our Lord” was just mentioned in verse 2, it seems likely that Peter was referring to the divine power of Christ seeing that the “immediate antecedent in v. 2 is Christ rather than God.”⁸⁸ The article ως, which begins the sentence, is left untranslated in the ESV and the NIV. The NASB translates this term

⁸⁶ Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 151-52.

⁸⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 208.

⁸⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 291.

with the phrase “seeing that” (1:3, NASB). The effect of the article is to tie the statement in verse 3 closely with the salutation in verse 2. Davids notes, “A new section is clearly starting with 2 Pet 1:3, but our author has let it flow grammatically from 1:2”⁸⁹ This grammatical connection serves to strengthen the argument that *αυτου* in verse 3 is a reference to “Jesus our Lord” (1:2).

The power (*δυναμις*) of Christ has granted to the believer “all things” (*παντα*) that pertain to “life and godliness” (1:3). Davids observes that “pairs of words like ‘life and godliness’ are common in 2 Peter, and often function as a hendiadys, two terms standing for a single entity.”⁹⁰ “A life of godliness” or “a godly life” would be the meaning expressed by the grammatical expression.⁹¹ The term “godliness” (*ευσεβεια*) is a word that literally means “good worship” or “piety.”⁹² Moo explains, “It is a general word, and the biblical authors use it to summarize the behavior expected of Christians who have come to know the God of Scripture.”⁹³ Peter will go on to delineate specific character qualities that describe a life of *εθσεβεια* (1:5-9). Here it is simply worth noting that “all things” (*παντα*) that the believer needs to live a godly life are supplied by the “divine power” of Christ (1:3). God’s spiritual resources are comprehensive in nature. Nothing is left out or can be added.

The divine power of Christ comes to the believer “through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (1:3). The term “knowledge” (*επιγνωσις*) is used elsewhere in this epistle to refer to the “knowledge of our Lord Jesus

⁸⁹ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 167-68.

⁹⁰ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 167-68.

⁹¹ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 178.

⁹² Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 41.

⁹³ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 41.

Christ” (1:8) and the “knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2:20, 3:18).⁹⁴ This pattern as well as the reference to “Jesus our Lord” (1:2) in the immediate context would favor the view that Peter is speaking of the “knowledge” of Christ in verse 3. According to Moo, *επειγνοσις* speaks of an “intimate and informed relationship that is the product of conversion to the gospel.”⁹⁵ God’s resources are sufficient, yet they are exclusively received through the knowledge of Christ and through no other means. There is no pursuit of godliness apart from Christ.

If the phrase “the knowledge of him” (1:3) is taken as a reference to Christ, then it is Christ “who has called us to his own glory and excellence” (1:3). The term “call” (*καλεω*) refers not to the general, universal call that goes out to all the world (Matt 22:14) but rather the specific effectual call of God which always results in genuine salvation (1 Pet 2:9, 5:10; Jude 1:1; Rom 8:30). While this “effective summons”⁹⁶ is typically attributed to God the Father (2 Thess 1:11; 2 Tim 1:9), there is no inconsistency in also attributing this calling to Christ (1:3). The calling of Christ results in the believer coming to a true knowledge of Christ. Green observes that the “knowledge of God is not the mere fruit of human inquiry or speculation but is the result of the divine initiative.”⁹⁷ Davids writes, “The achievement in our calling was all Jesus’ doing. We were called into our knowledge of him; it was not really our discovery.”⁹⁸

Believers have been called to the “glory and excellence” of Christ (1:3). The *δοξα* of Christ refers to his “majestic presence,”⁹⁹ which is spoken of again in verse 17.

⁹⁴ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 178.

⁹⁵ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 42.

⁹⁶ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 42.

⁹⁷ Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 182.

⁹⁸ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 171.

⁹⁹ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 42.

The “excellence” (ἀρετή) of Christ refers to His “virtue”¹⁰⁰ and speaks of the “beauty and loveliness of his moral character.”¹⁰¹ The ESV translates the preposition δια as “to his own glory and excellence” but the NASB has the better rendering: “by His own glory and excellence” (1:3, NASB). Richard Bauckham explains, “The dative can hardly give the sense ‘called to’ . . . but should be taken as instrumental. . . . [The phrase] presumably refers to the incarnate life, ministry and resurrection of Christ as a manifestation of divine power.”¹⁰²

The phrase “by which” (δι’ ὧν) in verse 4 can be translated “by means of which”¹⁰³ and ties together the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the “precious and very great promises,” (1:4) which belong to each believer. Bauckham writes, “By his saving activity Christ gave not only what is requisite for godly life in the present, but also promises for the future.”¹⁰⁴ Moo takes the view that the statement “he has granted to us his . . . promises” (1:4) means that “Christ has provided for the fulfillment of these promises.”¹⁰⁵ According to this view, Peter is thinking of the “many promises in the Old Testament about a new era of salvation and blessing.”¹⁰⁶ While it is true that Christians experience the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, that is most likely not the reference in verse 4. Peter’s usage of the language of “promise” (3:4, 9, 13) indicates that he is referring to promises that still await fulfillment in the future.

It is through these “precious” (τιμιος) and “very great” (μεγιστος) promises that believers are given a two-fold blessing. Positively, they “become partakers of the

¹⁰⁰ Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 183.

¹⁰¹ Schreiner, *I, 2 Peter, Jude*, 293.

¹⁰² Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 179.

¹⁰³ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 179.

¹⁰⁴ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 179.

¹⁰⁵ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 43.

divine nature” (1:4), and negatively, they have “escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (1:4).¹⁰⁷ The prospect of becoming “partakers” (κοινωνοί) of the “divine nature” is one that is worthy of careful reflection. Moo notes, “What he seems to mean is that believers come to share in some essential qualities that are characteristic of God himself.”¹⁰⁸ Such a glorious reality is fulfilled progressively in the present and then ultimately perfectly in the future (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2). Full resources are given to the believer to pursue godliness. Nothing needs to be added to what God has already given.

Conclusion

The five passages examined in this chapter support the view that the Scriptures are sufficient to equip the middle-aged believer in Christ. The written Word of God transforms the heart and conforms the believer into the likeness of Christ. While believers encounter unique challenges and difficulties in midlife, they have not been given an insufficient resource. They have been given the living and abiding Word of God, which is able to equip them “for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3).

¹⁰⁷ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 172.

¹⁰⁸ Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 43.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO COUNSELING MIDDLE-AGED BELIEVERS

A survey of literature from the field of secular psychology and Christian counseling¹ demonstrates that specific issues are to be observed among the middle-aged population of the world and the church. This chapter will summarize a sampling of the observations made by those in the field of secular psychology and Christian counseling in relation to the issues found in this age group. It will be observed from the survey in this chapter that many problems encountered in middle age are distinct from the problems encountered in adolescence or early adulthood. This survey then will demonstrate the need for a counseling curriculum which can address these specific struggles from a biblical point of view. This envisioned curriculum would take the principles of biblical counseling and apply them to the unique struggles observed in this age group. Because the Scriptures are sufficient to transform the believer into the likeness of Christ, there is hope and help for the middle-age believer in Christ.

¹ For the purposes of this chapter, the term *Christian counseling* will be used to describe a broad category that includes both the perspectives of Christian integrationism and biblical counseling. The term *integrationist* describes those authors who “aim to import the intellectual contents and psychotherapeutic practices of psychology into the church in a way that is consistent with biblical faith.” David Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 24. *Integrationism* promotes the idea that the tenets of secular psychology must be combined with Scripture to produce a meaningful framework for counseling ministry. Because integrationism promotes the view that secular resources are needed in addition to Scripture, it undermines the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. A full evaluation of integrationism is beyond the scope of this chapter. For survey purposes, it should be noted that while secular psychologists can make valid observations about human behavior, interpretations of that behavior will inevitably be flawed. Heath Lambert writes that secular psychologists “press their observations through the grid of a fallen worldview and will, inevitably, distort their observations with faulty interpretations.” Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 78. This chapter will survey the problems presented in the field of secular psychology and Christian counseling to demonstrate the need for a curriculum grounded in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture.

Secular Psychology and “Middle-Age”

The precise meaning of the term “middle age” has been defined in various ways in secular literature. For example, psychologists Phyllis Moen and Elaine Wethington observe, “It is difficult to set precise ages when midlife begins or ends. . . . The boundaries of midlife are ‘fluid.’”² Author Daniel Levinson agrees with this assessment and says, “Though every language provides terms such as ‘youth’ and ‘middle age,’ there is little agreement regarding their definition and their place in the life cycle.”³ Although Levinson defines “Middle adulthood” as being 40-65 years of age,⁴ he labels ages 40-45 as being the “Mid-Life Transition.”⁵ With that said, Levinson concedes that the timing of middle age is not precise: “Investigators have yet found no single event that universally heralds the end of early adulthood.”⁶ Psychoanalyst Arnold Modell observes, “We may not agree on the precise age of the onset of the middle years,”⁷ but adds the perspective that the importance of this age group is growing in today’s society. With the increase of life expectancy in the modern age, “the middle years constitute the longest span of our lives.”⁸ Modell asserts, “In a certain sense the middle years are life itself, or what living is about.”⁹ Although there is no precise definition of the term, the concept of “middle age” is nonetheless important.

² Phyllis Moen and Elaine Wethington, “Midlife Development in a Life Course Context,” in *Life in the Middle: Psychological and Social Development in Middle Age*, ed. Sherry L. Willis and James D. Reid (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999), 4.

³ Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 18.

⁴ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 18.

⁵ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 19.

⁶ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 24.

⁷ Arnold H. Modell, “Object Relations Theory: Psychic Aliveness in the Middle Years,” in *The Middle Years: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. John M. Oldham and Robert S. Liebert (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 17.

⁸ Modell, “Object Relations Theory,” 17.

⁹ Modell, “Object Relations Theory,” 17.

Secular psychology has generally neglected the study of middle-age development. Psychologists Sherry Willis and James Reid observe, “Of all the periods in the life-span, middle-age has received the least attention in terms of scholarly writing.”¹⁰ Perhaps this will change if man’s life expectancy continues to increase. One notable exception to the lack of scholarly attention to the subject is found in the writings of psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung. In 1933, Jung used the term “the second half of life”¹¹ to describe the stage of human development that begins around age 40. Jung remarked that entrance into this stage of life can be a bewildering experience for many people: “Thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life; worse still, we take this step with the false presupposition that our truths and ideals will serve us as hitherto.”¹² Jung’s treatment on the subject continues to be influential. Levinson plainly attributes his ideas to continuing the Jungian line of thought: “The idea of a Mid-life Transition was given its first modern formulation by C.G. Jung.”¹³ Contemporary author Mark Gerzon also borrows from Jung’s language in observing that “physically, socially, economically, psychologically, and spiritually, the agenda of the second half of life varies greatly from the agenda of the first.”¹⁴

While secular psychology has largely neglected the study of middle age from an academic perspective, enough attention has been paid to the subject to note the complex challenges that face many in this season of life. Psychoanalysts Robert Liebert and John Oldham describe middle-age as a period of “waning strength, fading beauty, biological clocks, the aging and death of parents, the departure from home of adolescent

¹⁰ Sherry L. Willis and James D. Reid, preface to Willis and Reid, *Life in the Middle*, xv.

¹¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933; repr., Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2017), 124.

¹² Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 124-25.

¹³ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 33.

¹⁴ Mark Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife: Turning Your Crisis into a Quest* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 13.

children, lost opportunities and renunciation of aspirations.”¹⁵ Levinson describes this time period as being marked by increasing physical limitations, “a distinct sense of bodily decline.”¹⁶ Accompanying this type of physical decline is a stark reminder of one’s mortality, which according to Elliott Jaques is a primary factor in the commonly observed “midlife crisis.” Jaques writes, “At age thirty-five the individual has reached the summit of life and sees a declining path before him with death at its end. This results in a crisis, stronger in some than others, connected with having to accept the reality of death.”¹⁷ No wonder people tend to resist labeling themselves as middle-aged because “it acknowledges two interconnected truths: that we may no longer be ‘young’ (whatever that means to us), and that, since life has a *midpoint*, it must also have an *endpoint*—and it is not one hundred and fifty!”¹⁸ In this season of life, the finite nature of life becomes more apparent by each passing day. Man can no longer avoid facing the inevitable. His days on this earth will not last forever.

In addition to facing increased physical limitations, the middle-aged person also typically experiences changes in the sphere of family life. For example, if a couple was married in their twenties or thirties, they now have a decade or two of marital experience behind them. Jungian psychologist Adolph Guggenbuhl-Craig offers this pessimistic perspective on the marital relationship:

It is well known that most people get on each other’s nerves even when they undertake only a fourteen day trip together. The two marriage partners, however, promise to live their whole lives (thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years) together in the greatest physical, spiritual, and psychological intimacy. . . . That a decent, responsible society not only allows, but actually encourages, young people in their

¹⁵ Robert S. Liebert and John M. Oldham, “Introduction: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives,” in Liebert and Oldham, *The Middle Years*, 2.

¹⁶ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 22.

¹⁷ Elliott Jaques, “Death and the Mid-Life Crisis,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 46 (1965): 502.

¹⁸ Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 18.

complete ignorance to bind themselves together permanently . . . seems incomprehensible.¹⁹

Guggenbuhl-Craig words are stark, but they do make the point that marriages can struggle when spouses enter middle age. Gerzon observes that “most forty-year-olds, not to mention seventy-year olds, do not have the same experience as do teenagers when they ‘date,’ ‘fall in love,’ and ‘marry.’”²⁰ Indeed, marriage in middle age can be marked by dramatic tensions and relational difficulties. Levinson explains, “The marital difficulties that surface in the Mid-life Transition may lead to various changes, from separation and divorce to reworking and improvement of the marriage.”²¹ Divorce brings its own complications and struggles. Psychologist David Chiriboga states, “Clinical and epidemiological studies have provided impressive evidence that separation and divorce are both associated with mental dysfunction.”²²

In middle age, a parent typically experiences substantial changes in the parenting relationship. The parental dynamics that exist between a parent and an infant are far different from the dynamics between a parent and a teenager. These changing dynamics in the parenting role can also complicate an already difficult marital relationship. Some parents in this age range can be struggling with their own personal disappointment at how life has turned out. Sadly, this personal struggle can damage the parent-child relationship. Author Helen Meyers explains, “If the middle-aged parent is disappointed in relation to his own ambitions and ideals, he may look to the adolescent for fulfillment of his own frustrated goals, investing the younger with unrealistic expectations that can lead

¹⁹ Adolph Guggenbuhl-Craig, “Marriage Is Dead, Long Live Marriage!,” in *Challenge of the Heart*, ed. John Wellwood (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1985), 159.

²⁰ Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 77-78.

²¹ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man's Life*, 257-58.

²² David A. Chiriboga, “Divorce at Midlife,” in *Midlife Loss: Coping Strategies*, ed. Richard A. Kalish (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 183.

only to disillusionment.”²³ Some parents may struggle when their children fail to reach certain goals. Conversely, other parents may experience resentment when the success of their children outpaces their own accomplishments. Indeed, a destructive influence can be unleashed when a parent is envious of a child’s success. Meyers observes, “The adolescent competes with the parent, the parent with the adolescent. This may be friendly and enhance growth, or it may be destructive.”²⁴ Even if a parent is free of such struggles, the very parting of a child from the household can be painful. According to Levinson, many middle-aged parents find that “the nest is emptying and the nuclear family is dividing into separate households.”²⁵ Empty-nesting brings its own set of challenges, as Margaret Huyck notes: “The discovery of an empty-nest syndrome with mild depression and a sense of void in the lives of middle-aged mothers suggested that the loss of an important structuring element might be responsible.”²⁶

Middle age can not only bring changes in the parent-child relationship, it can also bring changes in the child-parent relationship. Aging parents in need of care can be a source of physical and financial strain for the middle-aged person who must adapt to the role of a caregiver. Levinson notes that by age forty, a middle-aged man “is taking on parental responsibilities for parents, relatives and the generation of the elderly who look to him for care and leadership.”²⁷ This obligation signals “a new change in generational status [which] ordinarily begins in the late thirties and is well established in the mid-forties.”²⁸ Moen and Wethington concur that “providing care for family members and

²³ Helen Meyers, “The Impact of Teenaged Children on Parents,” in Oldham and Liebert, *The Middle Years*, 78.

²⁴ Meyers, “The Impact of Teenaged Children on Parents,” 87.

²⁵ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 23.

²⁶ Margaret Hellie Huyck, “Models of Midlife,” in Kalish, *Midlife Loss*, 119.

²⁷ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 23.

²⁸ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 28.

other relatives (ailing husbands, frail parents, or developmentally disabled children) . . . is often an unanticipated obligation confronted in the middle years of adulthood.”²⁹

Psychiatrist Rita Rogers observes, “The transition to becoming a parent to one’s elderly parent is not heralded by any rite of passage. There is no ceremony, no acknowledgement, no visible or tangible external change.”³⁰ She goes on to describe this transition as “a truly important event in the emotional calendar of a person”³¹ and one that “frequently adds strain to marital relationships.”³²

In addition to experiencing physical and family challenges, people in midlife can encounter seasons of mourning and sorrow. The simple truth is that suffering becomes more common as a person grows older. Rogers observes that in midlife “there are more accidents and heart attacks, more divorces, depressions, alcoholism, job failures, troubles with children or parents, suffering of all kinds.”³³ Losing a parent to death can bring great emotional pain. Miriam Ross and Sidney Moss comment, “Parental death is an event in the lives of most middle-aged people and a poignant theme in the lives of all.”³⁴ People not only lose parents but lose spouses in this age range. Psychologist Alice Demi points out that while the “death of a spouse is relatively uncommon in the middle years,”³⁵ there is still “a sizable number of widowed persons [who] fall in midlife age groups.”³⁶ As Demi observes, losing a spouse in middle-age can be complicated by a number of factors

²⁹ Moen and Wethington, “Midlife Development in a Life Course Context,” 10.

³⁰ Rita R. Rogers, “On Parenting One’s Elderly Parent,” in *Modern Perspectives in the Psychiatry of Middle Age*, ed. John G. Howells (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1981), 188.

³¹ Rogers, “On Parenting One’s Elderly Parent,” 188.

³² Rogers, “On Parenting One’s Elderly Parent,” 192.

³³ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 34.

³⁴ Miriam S. Moss and Sidney Z. Moss, “The Death of a Parent,” in Kalish, *Midlife Loss*, 89.

³⁵ Alice S. Demi, “Death of a Spouse,” in Kalish, *Midlife Loss*, 218.

³⁶ Demi, “Death of a Spouse,” 219.

unique to this age group: “Midlife widowed persons have multiple demands on their time and energy; most are wage earners who must also manage a home, and many are, in addition, caretakers of dependent children and aged parents.” Grieving is a demanding experience which has no easy resolution. Seasons of sorrow can be long. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler give this advice to those grieving the loss of a loved one: “You will be whole again but you will never be the same.”³⁷

In the midst of physical, family, and emotional difficulties, people describe midlife as a time of strain and personal crisis. Psychologist Connie Zweig put it simply: “At midlife, I met my devils.”³⁸ Psychologist Milton Horowitz describes the struggle in midlife as follows: “Something seems missing, old ambitions are unfulfilled, personal powers have failed or are failing, physical health is undependable, and romantic and sexual expectations become embroiled in new conflicts.”³⁹ Gerzon writes, “The quest into the second half doesn’t just feel frightening. It is frightening. The risks are real. . . . Midlife can raise the ante of living so high that we no longer dare to play.”⁴⁰ In the early fourteenth century, Italian poet Dante Alighieri wrote the famous lines in his poem “The Divine Comedy”: “Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself within a forest dark, For the straightforward pathway had been lost.”⁴¹ Elizabeth L. Auchincloss and Robert Michels note that Elliott Jaques interpreted “The Divine Comedy” as “Dante’s

³⁷ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 230.

³⁸ Connie Zweig, “Prologue,” in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1991), xiv.

³⁹ Milton H. Horowitz, “The Developmental and Structural Viewpoints: On the Fate of Unconscious Fantasies in Middle Life,” in *The Middle Years: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. John M. Oldham and Robert S. Liebert (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 7.

⁴⁰ Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 29.

⁴¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno, the Purgatorio, and the Paradiso*, trans. John Ciardi (New York: New American Library, 2003), 5.

experience of the mid-life crisis, a ‘full and worked-through conscious encounter with death.’”⁴²

Jaques’ twentieth-century term “midlife crisis” is now used by many secular writers to describe the intense struggle common to many in middle age. Journalist Jane Brody remarks that a “midlife crisis” is “often marked by self-doubt, marital discord and divorce, extramarital affairs, abrupt career shifts, personality changes, sexual problems, depression and newly awakened anxieties about health and mortality.”⁴³ Levinson contends, “Some men do very little questioning or searching during the Mid-life Transition. . . . But for the great majority of men—about 80 percent of our subjects—this period evokes tumultuous struggles within the self and with the external world.”⁴⁴ While Levinson’s observations are limited to those of the male gender, psychologist Paul Ornstein widens the scope of the term “midlife crisis” to include the struggles of male and female: “Men and women [are] engaged in a lifelong attempt to fulfill their nuclear ambitions, nuclear skills and talents, and nuclear values and ideals. . . . When time begins to run out and the chance for some fulfillment of these ambitions, skills, talents, values, and ideals appears to be less likely, the well known mid-life crisis sets in.”⁴⁵

Jaques’ idea that midlife crisis is “connected with having to accept the reality of death”⁴⁶ is more complex than it might first appear. A midlife crisis is not only triggered by despondency over inevitable death, but also by the reappraisal of a person’s values, pursuits, and accomplishments in light of the finite time left on earth. Levinson

⁴² Elizabeth L. Auchincloss and Robert Michels, “The Impact of Middle Age on Ambitions and Ideals,” in Oldham and Liebert, *The Middle Years*, 51. For the original quote, see Jaques, “Death and the Mid-Life Crisis,” 505.

⁴³ Jane E. Brody, “Personal Health,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/22/garden/personal-health-203491.html>.

⁴⁴ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 198-99.

⁴⁵ Paul H. Ornstein, “Self Psychology: The Fate of the Nuclear Self in the Middle Years,” in Oldham and Liebert, *The Middle Years*, 38.

⁴⁶ Jaques, “Death and the Mid-Life Crisis,” 502.

summarizes, “A man in Mid-life Transition is troubled by his seemingly imminent death. He is beset even more by the anxiety that he will not be able to make his future better than his past.”⁴⁷ Gerzon explains, “Those afflicted by this middle-age malaise are likely to be haunted by questions such as, ‘What have I accomplished? Is this all there is to life? What do I really want? Am I heading anywhere but the cemetery?’”⁴⁸ Auchincloss and Michels agree with the perspective that “the middle-aged person must come to terms with an increasing awareness of the reality of death.”⁴⁹ A reassessment of the life lived so far can provoke the startling realization that there has not been much meaning in the life that has passed.

The experience of physical growth and intellectual growth is well defined in childhood and adolescence by specific structures which exist in society. For example, grade school children are promoted to junior high and high school, and high school students graduate to college-level studies and vocation. In contrast, the type of changes experienced by those in midlife are accompanied by no such societal markers. Instead, as Levinson observes, “Middle age is usually defined as a vague interim period, defined primarily in negative terms. One is no longer young and not quite old—but what is one in a positive sense?”⁵⁰ The default expectation is that the great changes which characterize childhood will give way to the stability and stasis of middle age. Indeed, this expectation was reinforced by the writings of Sigmund Freud who wrote that “personality change past the age of 50 years was virtually impossible.”⁵¹ Gerzon explains Freud’s influence on modern day thought in this way: “The warmed-over Freudianism that had swept

⁴⁷ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, 216.

⁴⁸ Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 46.

⁴⁹ Auchincloss and Michels, “The Impact of Middle Age on Ambitions and Ideals,” 45.

⁵⁰ Levinson, *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, x.

⁵¹ Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Loren Anguillo Connolly, “The Developing Self in Midlife,” in Willis and Reid, *Life in the Middle*, 26.

America . . . said virtually nothing about adults. The implication was that grownups had been formed in childhood—and therefore had finished growing.”⁵² A “crisis” ensues when expectations fail to meet reality: “We turn the second half into a ‘midlife crisis’ by pretending that everything is supposed to stay the same—only to discover, to our surprise, that nothing does stay the same.”⁵³

A survey from the field of secular psychology demonstrates that unique physical, relational, and emotional struggles are observed in the middle-age population of society. This chapter will now turn its attention to the treatment of issues related to middle age written from a Christian perspective.

Christian Counseling and “Middle-Age”

A survey from the field of Christian counseling supports the thesis that specific issues are observed among the middle-age population in the church. This survey will incorporate both observations made by biblical counselors who affirm the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling ministry and also those writing from an integrationist perspective. As stated earlier in this chapter, the term *integrationist* describes authors who “aim to import the intellectual contents and psychotherapeutic practices of psychology into the church in a way that is consistent with biblical faith.”⁵⁴ Generally speaking, Christian integrationists believe that Scripture should be used in counseling but Scripture in itself is not sufficient. A full evaluation of the tenets of Christian integrationism is beyond the scope of this chapter. For survey purposes, this chapter will include both observations made by those who affirm the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling and those who believe that Scripture must be combined with secular psychology to help people with the issues of life. Biblical counselor Heath Lambert observes, “It is most helpful to understand the

⁵² Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 205.

⁵³ Gerzon, *Listening to Midlife*, 13.

⁵⁴ Powlison, “Critiquing Modern Integrationists,” 24.

information available in psychology as existing on three levels: observations, interpretations, and interventions.”⁵⁵ While the observations of secular psychologists and Christian integrationists can be helpful in understanding human behavior, their interpretations of that data are inevitably flawed because they operate from a man-centered worldview. Nonetheless, as Lambert observes, secular psychology can make helpful observations about human behavior because “the negative results [of sin’s operations on the mind] are smallest at the observational level, and we can have the highest confidence in the operations of God’s common grace.”⁵⁶

The term “middle age” and the corresponding word “midlife” are not defined in any specific way in the literature of Christian counseling. Author Jim Conway points out that “experts disagree on what years should be identified as the midlife years or when the [midlife] crisis is most likely to take place.”⁵⁷ In the end, Conway concedes, “The midlife crisis is not so much a matter of a man’s chronological age as it is his state of mind.”⁵⁸ Elyse Fitzpatrick describes this stage of life thematically as “the afternoon of life”: “In America, the average woman’s life expectancy is seventy-nine years. If you divide these years into equal fifteen-year segments and link those segments to the times of a day, it looks something like this: . . . 46-60 [represents] Afternoon Until Twilight.”⁵⁹ While the concept of middle age is not specifically defined in the literature of Christian counseling, there appears to be a general agreement that such a life stage exists. Tripp uses the imagery of seasons to express this concept: “Midlife is a time of harvest. The leaves are off the trees and there is no putting them back. . . . When you’ve spent your

⁵⁵ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 76.

⁵⁶ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 77.

⁵⁷ Jim Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1997), 31.

⁵⁸ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 32.

⁵⁹ Elyse Fitzpatrick, *The Afternoon of Life: Finding Purpose and Joy in Midlife* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 11.

life planting, it seems weird and unnatural to harvest, but you have no choice. You are in your own personal autumn.”⁶⁰ David Arp and Claudia Arp describe a marriage as experiencing “The Second Half of Marriage,”⁶¹ which is typically characterized as having “teenagers who will soon leave the nest.”⁶² Arp and Arp decline to specify an exact age range for middle age, but do include a number of questionnaires in their book which focus on the age range 40-60.⁶³

The physical difficulties encountered in middle age are well-attested to in the literature of Christian counseling. Tripp observes, “Weakness and aging are significant parts of the midlife struggle . . . all of our bodies age and change. There are things we once did that we cannot do any longer.”⁶⁴ According to Tripp, the inevitable physical changes include “wrinkles, rashes, spider veins, graying hair, loss of hair, hair where it shouldn’t be (in your ears), muscle loss and softening, weight gain, loss of flexibility, loss of energy, chronic aches and pains, vision loss, sagging skin, skin discoloration, tiredness, hearing loss, stiffness of joints, and the list goes on.”⁶⁵ Conway elaborates, “The man in his forties is also having physical problems. His weight is beginning to shift toward the trunk of his body. His skin is beginning to sag. He is losing that beautiful hair. . . . And, insult of insults, he may also have some acne problems.”⁶⁶ Women have their own unique physical struggles in midlife. Biblical counselor Amy Baker explains, “Menopause and

⁶⁰ Paul David Tripp, *Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004), 104.

⁶¹ David Arp and Claudia Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of the Empty-Nest Years* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 31.

⁶² Arp and Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage*, 30.

⁶³ Arp and Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage*, 34-40.

⁶⁴ Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*, 77.

⁶⁵ Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*, 77.

⁶⁶ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 66.

peri-menopause remind us that we are aging. They seem to taunt ‘Your youth is gone.’”⁶⁷

Fitzpatrick describes the physical changes she experienced in middle age in this way:

Perimenopause symptoms, including intermittent menstrual periods and hot flashes . . . feeling like PMS had become my new permanent boarder. . . . Some of these changes are unsettling. I don’t like looking in the mirror and seeing cellulite, jowls, and wrinkles. My hands are becoming furrowed, my eyelids are drooping, and the color seems to be fading from my body. I think that this is called the aging process.⁶⁸

In addition to the relatively normal effects of aging, many middle-aged people encounter the suffering associated with specific illnesses. Rheumatologist James Halla observes, “Older bodies just don’t function as well as younger ones. Other medical problems, such as cancer, neurological conditions, or joint problems like rheumatoid arthritis, may cause our bodies to fail.”⁶⁹ James Halla also states that “at times, body failure occurs when nothing is visible from the outside, such as in cases of chronic pain.”⁷⁰ Author Michael Emler agrees with Halla’s perspective: “Everyone has experienced acute physical pain—the kind of pain that lasts for seconds, minutes, hours, or maybe even days. But some experience chronic pain, the kind of bone-wearying, soul-deadening pain that last for weeks, months, or even years.”⁷¹ A myriad of specific illnesses can strike as the physical body grow older. In midlife, the “delusions of invincibility”⁷² begin to fade away.

One example of a physical illness that causes chronic pain is rheumatoid arthritis. Author Mary Yerkes describes her experience of arthritis as “a nagging, persistent

⁶⁷ Amy Baker, *Menopause: Help for the “Hot and Bothered”* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2012), 4.

⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick, *The Afternoon of Life*, 162.

⁶⁹ James Halla, “When Your Body Betrays You,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 29.

⁷⁰ Halla, “When Your Body Betrays You,” 29.

⁷¹ Michael Emler, “When It Won’t Go Away: A Biblical Response to Chronic Pain,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 21.

⁷² Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*, 81.

stiffness in my hands. . . . the stiffness spread to my knees, my feet, my hips, and even my spine.”⁷³ Arthritis can bring severe limitations upon a person’s daily activities. In Yerkes’ case, she recalls that the pain was so severe that “even lifting a glass of water at dinner was a challenge.”⁷⁴ Certain physical issues experienced in midlife are closely tied together with emotional challenges. One example is the “pain of infertility and childlessness.”⁷⁵ Author Rosemary Morgan observes, “Dealing with infertility is a gradual process. . . . Nobody is capable of dealing with their infertility all at once.”⁷⁶ Thus, a married couple may experience infertility in their twenties and thirties yet not deal with the full emotional ramifications of the issue until they reach their forties and fifties. The emotional pain of infertility can be intense. Author Kimberly Monroe writes, “Women who experienced either chronic or life-threatening diseases ranked the emotional pain of infertility at similar levels to that of terminal illness.”⁷⁷ Even the joy of adopting children may not erase the sorrow of infertility. Monroe explains her husband Phil’s experience: “Four years after we stopped fertility treatments, we started adoption procedures. But then, Phil’s grief kicked in. . . . People grieve in different ways at different times.”⁷⁸ These emotional burdens can place great pressure upon a marriage. Physical illness can lead to relational difficulties.

Marriage in middle age can have its own challenges and struggles. The pressures encountered in this age range include, but are not limited to, caring for aging parents,

⁷³ Mary J. Yerkes, “Beauty Instead of Ashes: Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 33-34.

⁷⁴ Yerkes, “Beauty Instead of Ashes,” 34.

⁷⁵ Rosemary Morgan, *Living with Infertility—A Christian Perspective* (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013), 7.

⁷⁶ Morgan, *Living with Infertility*, 9-10.

⁷⁷ Kimberly Monroe and Philip Monroe, “The Bible and the Pain of Infertility,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 50.

⁷⁸ Monroe and Monroe, “The Bible and the Pain of Infertility,” 50.

dealing with the experience of the “empty nest,” and facing the unique vocational and financial challenges associated with midlife career transitions. Authors Gary Chapman and Harold Myra ask, “What does it look like to thrive in our marriages in our fifties, sixties, and beyond? . . . we can’t ignore the realities of health limitations, worries about money, and the prospects for our grown children.”⁷⁹ They are frank about some of the marital challenges faced by many in midlife: “We may be lonely as friends move away. Some of us are watching parents fade into dementia. Others are still getting kids through college, or wondering about the next stage of their work lives.”⁸⁰ Arp and Arp observe, “With the birthing of the second half of marriage, couples enter an uncharted course where mentors are few and far between.”⁸¹ In addition, over the course of a marriage, small issues can build up over time. If left unresolved, these issues can cause pronounced tension in midlife. Arp and Arp explain, “When a long-term marriage crumbles, most of the time it isn’t because of a major crisis or a one-time event. More likely, it’s the result of little issues that have built up over the years until they threaten the very foundation of the marriage.”⁸² A couple can realize after the course of many years that their primary connection point has been the activity of raising children and not the building up of their own marriage. The consequences of such neglect are seen in the number of separations and divorces that occur after children are raised and leave home.

Authors Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell write from an integrationist perspective and address the struggles associated with parenting adult children. Their book *How to Really Love Your Adult Child: Building a Healthy Relationship in a Changing*

⁷⁹ Gary Chapman and Harold Myra, *Married and Still Loving It: The Joys and Challenges of the Second Half* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 10.

⁸⁰ Chapman and Myra, *Married and Still Loving It*, 10.

⁸¹ Arp and Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage*, 30.

⁸² Arp and Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage*, 54.

World identifies a number of issues associated with this season of life. According to the authors, adult children can fail to thrive in one or more of the following ways:

Doing poorly in college, wasting time and money; finishing college but then wandering and/or moving back home for a while to “get their feet on the ground”; having a marriage end in divorce in a few years, perhaps moving back home with a child or two; spending far beyond their means; or making lifestyle and employment choices that turn out disastrously.⁸³

The authors describe the phenomenon known as “boomerang children.”⁸⁴ They describe the “boomerang effect” in the following way: “You think they are gone and then they come back to you.”⁸⁵ The introduction of adult children into an empty-nesting household can create great stress for all involved. The expectations of parents can be dashed when they realize that their parenting task is not yet over. Chapman and Campbell observe, “It is . . . difficult for many of the midlife parents who were looking forward to having more time for themselves and each other. Although they expected to feel a brief time of loss after the children left for college or work, they still anticipated their increased freedom.”⁸⁶ Other factors can complicate an already difficult situation. For example, oftentimes “boomerang children return home bringing their own children. When this happens their parents’ stress level may skyrocket.”⁸⁷ In many cases, the adult children returning home are recovering from the heartaches and disappointments of adult life. The authors write that these children “return home the worse for the wear. Their experience in the adult world has depleted their emotional energy. . . . Parents who open their doors to these tired

⁸³ Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child: Building a Healthy Relationship in a Changing World* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2011), 22.

⁸⁴ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 61.

⁸⁵ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 59.

⁸⁶ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 39.

⁸⁷ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 66.

children are often tired themselves.”⁸⁸ Having reached a perceived finish line in life, parents realize there is another race to be run.

A related yet separate issue encountered in midlife concerns adult children who turn away from the Christian faith. The heartache of watching an adult child follow a non-Christian path in life can lead to great disappointment and disillusionment. Author Jim Newheiser writes from a biblical counseling perspective and recalls the heartache he and his wife, Caroline, encountered when their sons turned away from the Christian faith: “Perhaps you can imagine our shock when our oldest son informed us that he no longer believed that Jesus Christ was the only way to God or that the Bible was authoritative.”⁸⁹ Newheiser recalls struggling with a number of questions related to the faithfulness of their parenting: “Did our kids turn away from our faith because we failed to live for the Lord as we should? Did we neglect our children? How could we have been so mistaken?”⁹⁰ Many Christian parents face a similar heartbreak in the years of midlife when their children are growing into adulthood. Compounding the pain is the mistaken expectation that raising children according to certain methods would guarantee that they embrace the Christian faith. Newheiser refers to this as the misguided notion that there are “‘right’ parenting formulas that guarantee you’ll have godly children.”⁹¹ Many in the church experience a similar heartbreak. Newheiser recounts that “in my ministry as a pastor and biblical counselor, I’ve . . . met other Christian parents with shattered dreams. I have met godly parents whose children had become involved in every form of worldliness, including drugs, alcohol, fornication, and even homosexuality. In fact, I’ve

⁸⁸ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 61-62.

⁸⁹ Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 8-9.

⁹⁰ Fitzpatrick, Newheiser, and Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 10.

⁹¹ Fitzpatrick, Newheiser, and Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 20.

been amazed at how *many* Christian parents are hurting.”⁹² Robert Jones comments, “Our anguish comes when our beloved son or daughter walks away from the Christian faith, the faith we embraced ourselves and taught and modeled for them. We crave God’s best for our kids . . . we and our other family members grieve over their choices.”⁹³

Scripture speaks to the blessing of seeing one’s grandchildren (Ps 128:1-6). Many believers experience this blessing in middle age. Yet even in this area there can be struggle and difficulty. Fitzpatrick cautions, “I know that for many women, there’s sorrow here too. I’m aware that there are many women who rarely see their grandchildren.”⁹⁴ While technology exists in the modern age to communicate with grandchildren at a distance, many middle-aged grandparents can struggle with unfulfilled expectations. While some may struggle with seeing their grandchildren too little, others may struggle seeing grandchildren too often. Campbell and Chapman observe, “Perhaps the most unusual situation grandparents may encounter is when they become parents again—rearing grandchildren on a temporary or permanent basis. . . . A 2010 Pew survey found that 1 in 10 American children are now being raised by grandparents—or 2.9 million children.”⁹⁵ Some grandparents must step in to fulfill such a role because their adult child has experienced a divorce. In this situation, the middle-aged grandparent may be working through his or her own sorrow while at the same time taking on child-rearing responsibilities. Chapman and Campbell explain, “Grandparents often are experiencing their own pain, even grief, because of their children’s divorce, and grandparents must learn to control their own emotions in order to help their grandchildren.”⁹⁶

⁹² Fitzpatrick, Newheiser, and Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 11.

⁹³ Robert D. Jones, *Prodigal Children: Hope and Help for Parents* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2018), 2.

⁹⁴ Fitzpatrick, *The Afternoon of Life*, 103.

⁹⁵ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 126.

⁹⁶ Chapman and Campbell, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child*, 124.

As noted previously, the experience of grief and sorrow over the loss of a loved one is a common experience in middle age. This topic is addressed not only in secular literature but also from the perspective of Christian counseling. Biblical counselor Paul Tautges explains, “Grief is part of the human experience, a reflection of our being created in God's image.”⁹⁷ Ryan Showalter observes that grief “should not be viewed as a simple emotion, but as a reaction in which a range of emotions will be present.”⁹⁸ As is evident from the tears of Jesus at the gravesite of Lazarus (John 11:35), even the hope of eternal life does not remove all sorrow over loss. The death of a loved one can be immensely difficult not only because of its emotional impact but also because of its practical demands. Fitzpatrick notes, “The passing of someone near is a surprisingly complicated and stressful time. It isn't merely stressful because of the grief that we experience; it is stressful because we have so much to do, so many decisions to make. . . . “The thought of having to make preparations in the midst of our grief is staggering.”⁹⁹ For many, the experience of saying good-bye to a loved one is a process that is extended over time. Middle-age adults oftentimes find themselves caring for aging parents with a long-term illness. Don Guthrie and Nancy Guthrie record the reflection of pastor Max Lucado who said, “In a long-term illness, the one you love dies a little more every day.”¹⁰⁰ Grieving takes time and is invariably messy. Chapman and Myra explain, “Everyone's grief is unique, and sometimes it is hard to see past one's own pain . . . the death of a child, or an adult child's spouse, can confuse and isolate even a mature, loving couple.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Paul Tautges, *Comfort the Grieving* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 35

⁹⁸ Ryan Showalter, *Grieving the Loss of Your Child: Comfort for Your Broken Heart* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014), 5.

⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick, *The Afternoon of Life*, 149.

¹⁰⁰ David Guthrie and Nancy Guthrie, *When Your Family's Lost a Loved One: Finding Hope Together* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 71.

¹⁰¹ Chapman and Myra, *Married and Still Loving It*, 142.

While struggles with family relationships make up a large number of middle-age counseling issues, one topic that must not be neglected in this survey is the experience of singleness in middle age. Many middle-aged singles are part of the fellowship of the church. Christian singles can fall into three broad categories: (1) those who have never been married; (2) those who have been divorced; and (3) those who are widows or widowers. Each person's circumstances are unique and worthy of careful consideration. Sadly, the topic of singleness is addressed with less frequency than that of marriage and parenting in Christian counseling literature. Barry Danylak's *Redeeming Singleness* helps to fill in the gap, encouraging singles with a biblical perspective: "The distinctively biblical Christian view of singleness needs to be articulated again to an increasingly pagan wider world. . . . Christian singleness is a testimony to the supreme sufficiency of Christ for all things, testifying that through Christ life is fully blessed even without marriage and children."¹⁰² Jeff Forrey helps identify the "verbal line mines" that counselors should avoid saying to Christian singles. These include, "I just don't understand why you are not married yet." "You should get married." "You are too picky." "Let God fulfill you."¹⁰³

While there are a number of good materials available on helping a single person pursue marriage, fewer resources exist to encourage a single who has experienced the devastating trial of divorce. One such resource is Winston T. Smith's helpful booklet entitled *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way*. Smith describes the pain of divorce as an "agonizing experience" and compassionately addresses the person in such circumstances: "Your hopes and dreams for your marriage were ended by the bitter reality of your divorce; your life is full of unwanted changes; and you struggle every day

¹⁰² Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 214.

¹⁰³ Jeff Forrey, "Biblical Counsel for Concerned Singles," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 31-32.

with a mixture of grief, fear, guilt and anger.”¹⁰⁴ Smith acknowledges the grief of one who has experienced divorce: “You are facing two painful things: the loss of your spouse and the end of the hopes and dreams you had for your life together.”¹⁰⁵ More literature like this should be produced by biblical counselors to minister to single believers who have experienced divorce.

In the midst of these emotional and relational challenge, many people find middle age to be a time of personal struggle. Conway writes, “The midlife crisis is a time of high risk for marriages. It is a time of potential career disruption. There is depression, anger, frustration, and rebellion.”¹⁰⁶ Although his work is entitled *Men in Midlife Crisis*, Conway devotes a considerable amount of space addressing the struggles encountered by women in middle age. A woman in this life stage can be wrestling with her own questions regarding identity and meaning. The battle can be especially intense for mothers with growing children. Conway describes the period of the “empty nest” being preceded by the period of the “quiet nest.”¹⁰⁷ The phrase “quiet nest” refers to the years in which children are no longer dependent on the mother in every hour and are typically spending many hours at school. Therefore, “there are still children in the home . . . [but] there are long periods during the day when the house is quiet—almost deafeningly so.”¹⁰⁸ In the period of the “quiet nest,” opportunity is given to reflect on one’s station in life. Resentment can build up in this time period due to unrealized expectations and unfulfilled dreams. Questions arise in this time period such as, “When will I get time for my career? Why can’t I go back to school to finish my degree? Why am I only working to make

¹⁰⁴ Winston T. Smith, *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God’s Way* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 3.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *Divorce Recovery*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 178.

¹⁰⁸ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 178.

everyone's else life run smoothly?"¹⁰⁹ Such questions can give rise to a "crisis"-like experience as a woman seeks to understand her station in life.

Tripp agrees with the assessment that the experience of "midlife crisis" is not limited to men. He writes, "Midlife crisis *is* a struggle of identity and responsibility, and it exposes weaknesses in these areas that have existed for a long time."¹¹⁰ According to Tripp, the issues raised in midlife are issues related to the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). He observes, "The functional theology that shapes the way a person responds during this period is rooted in the values, treasures, and cravings of the person's heart."¹¹¹ In many cases, the disappointment of a number of cherished expectations give rise to a "crisis"-like experience that leads a person down the path of despair and hopelessness. A person realizes that with the limited time to live, that he or she will never reach the goal of climbing to the top of a cherished mountain. In many cases it is not the failure to reach certain goals but actually the accomplishment of those goals that can trigger the same reaction of despair and hopelessness. A person may spend decades pursuing a treasured aim in life, only to find in middle age that this accomplishment is not satisfying. After climbing a mountain, one finds there is nothing worthwhile at the top.

Conclusion

The literature of secular psychology and Christian counseling describes a number of problems and challenges unique to middle age. Believers in Christ are not immune from experiencing many of these difficulties. Because the problems of middle-age are varied and complex, they call for a counseling ministry that blends biblical discernment with pastoral sensitivity. The observations made in this survey support the need for a curriculum which trains biblical counselors in the local church to minister to

¹⁰⁹ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 178.

¹¹⁰ Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*, 37.

¹¹¹ Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*, 50.

middle-aged believer in Christ. Such a curriculum would build upon the basic principles of biblical counseling and apply them to the specific issues encountered in midlife. This curriculum would be founded upon the truth that the Word of God is sufficient to equip for “every good work” (2 Tim 3:17).

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF MINISTRY PROJECT

The purpose of this ministry project was to train biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. This purpose was fulfilled through the development of a twelve-hour training program that took the principles of God's Word and applied them to the issues facing middle-aged believers in Christ. The training program combined teaching in a lecture format with interactive role play counseling sessions. Preparation for the ministry project took place during the months of May-July 2020. The training program was taught to twelve class participants on the weekend of August 7-9, 2020.

Preparation of the Ministry Project

Survey of Kindred Community Church

The first goal of the ministry project was to discover the current issues being experienced by the middle-aged members of Kindred Community Church. To achieve this goal, an online survey was created and distributed to the middle-aged members of Kindred Community Church.¹ On May 4, 2020, an email invitation was given to over 400 members at the church requesting their participation in the survey. A total of 123 members from the church participated in the survey.

The survey was designed to rank in terms of significance a total of twelve potential counseling issues in the middle-aged population of the church. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess the perceived significance of each counseling topic. The

¹ See appendix 1. The online platform Formstack was used to securely host the survey and the data pertaining to the responses. The final participant turned in her survey on May 19, 2020.

options for response were 1 = not at all important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = very important; and 5 = extremely important.

In addition, the survey asked the participant to rank the top three issues that were most relevant in the person’s experience. A fill-in-the-blank section allowed for the participant to name a counseling issue not already suggested in the survey. At the end of the survey, the number scores of the Likert scale was tallied to yield a ranking of the perceived significance of counseling issues.² The end result of this analysis is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Perceived importance of middle-age counseling issues

Rank	Topic	Total Score
1	Caring for Aging Parents and/or Chronically Ill Loved Ones	537
2	Processing Grief after You’ve Lost a Loved One	521
3	Understanding Marriage Dynamics After 25 Years	505
4	How to Relate to Adult Children	497
5	Dealing with Chronic Illness and/or Chronic Pain	472
6	Transitioning to Life as a Widow in the Church	467
7	Financial Issues During the Middle Age Years	457
8	Transitioning to the Empty Nest	436
9	Singleness as a Middle-Aged Believer in the Church	433
10	Relating to Adult Children Who Have Come to Live Back Home	423
11	Experiencing “Midlife Crisis”	392
12	Living with Prolonged Infertility	316

Interviews

After the surveys were completed, an additional step was completed to gain a clearer picture of the most common struggles among middle-aged believers at Kindred Community Church. Fifteen people were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed in a live, semi-structured format. These interview candidates were selected out of the 123

² The value assigned to the level of perceived importance was multiplied by the number of respondents using that assessment.

participants who had filled out the online survey.³ The interviews were scheduled for a timeframe of 15-30 minutes.⁴ In the interview, participants were asked to name their perceived top three counseling issues among the middle-aged population at the church.⁵ A number of follow-up questions were asked to draw out the participant's perspective on these issues. Interviews commenced on July 13 and the last interview was completed on July 24. A number of valuable insights were shared in these interviews, which eventually informed key sections of the course curriculum.

Selection of Topics

After carefully considering both the online survey of 123 participants and the content of the fifteen live interviews, the decision was made to focus on the following eight topics in the curriculum:

1. Biblically Evaluating "Midlife Crisis"
2. Processing Grief over Losing a Loved One
3. Understanding Marriage Dynamics over 25 Years
4. Parenting Adult Children
5. Singleness as a Middle-Aged Believer in Christ
6. Transitioning to Life as a Widow in the Church
7. Dealing with Chronic Illness and/or Chronic Pain
8. Caring for Aging Parents

Because of time constraints, I chose to incorporate some of the subjects in my survey as sub-topics in the other eight lessons. For example, the topic of "Transitioning to the Empty Nest" was incorporated into the lesson "Understanding Marriage Dynamics

³ Interview candidates were selected in a semi-random fashion. Priority was placed on those who were available to interview in an immediate timeframe.

⁴ Due to medical risks related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 interviews were conducted online using the Zoom meeting platform. Two interviews were conducted in-person following social distancing guidelines.

⁵ See appendix 2 for the interview questions.

after 25 Years.” The topic of “Living with Prolonged Fertility” was included as a sub-topic under the heading of “Dealing with Chronic Illness and/or Chronic Pain.” I limited the scope of the curriculum and did not address the topic of “Financial Issues during the Middle Age Years” due to lack of space and time.

Preparation of Curriculum

The second goal of the project was to develop a twelve-session curriculum that would equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. Lessons preparations for the curriculum began the week of July 20-24 concurrently with the final interviews. At this point, the outline of the curriculum was being formed and research had begun on some of the major topics. The majority of the curriculum lessons were completed in an intensive week of study from July 25-31. When the eight teaching sessions were completed, the curriculum comprised of sixty-two pages of written material. On July 31, the curriculum was submitted to an expert panel of ACBC Certified biblical counselors. The qualifications of this expert panel are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Expert panel of ACBC certified biblical counselors

Name	Qualifications
Dr. Greg Gifford	Professor of Biblical Counseling at the Master’s University ACBC Certified Biblical Counselor
Dr. Keith Palmer	ACBC Board Member ACBC Fellow and Certified Biblical Counselor
Michael Seehusen	Instructor of Biblical Counseling at Fiji Bible College ACBC Certified Biblical Counselor
Jesse Randolph	Ordained Pastor ACBC Certified Biblical Counselor

The expert panel members each filled out an evaluation rubric and returned it to me the following week.⁶ The final evaluation was received on Thursday, August 6. In general, the curriculum received positive feedback. The mean score per evaluation criteria

⁶ See appendix 3.

was 3.875, indicating that the general evaluation was rated closest to “exemplary.”⁷ One evaluator wrote, “The outline was exceptional in regard to its clarity.” Another evaluator wrote, “Anyone who counsels middle-aged believers would benefit from this material.” One helpful suggestion given by an evaluator was to clarify the critique of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s secular “Five Stages of Grieving” in lesson 2 of the course. In response to this comment, I incorporated a sharper critique of the secular model of grieving in the final presentation of the course materials.

Selection of Class Participants

Enrollment in the course was by invitation only. The prerequisite for enrollment was completion of ACBC Basic Training Course. Twelve participants were enrolled in the course. Each of these students were members of Kindred Community Church and part of the counseling training program at the Kindred Counseling Center. Priority enrollment was given to those who were ACBC certified biblical counselors and those actively counseling at the Kindred Counseling Center.⁸ Enrollment was limited to twelve people so that the role-playing component of the training course could be completed within the time constraints of the course. All students were required to attend all of the course sessions with no exceptions made for missed sessions.

Pre-Course Assessment

On Saturday, August 1, a pre-course survey was distributed electronically to the class participants designed to measure students’ knowledge and competence in addressing issues specific to middle-aged believers. This pre-course survey was separate and distinct from the general online survey conducted in March. The pre-course survey

⁷ See appendix 4 for the full curriculum review results from the four-person expert panel. The scoring options on the rubric were 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

⁸ The training profile of the class participants was as follows: 4 students were ACBC Certified Biblical Counselors; 3 students were in ACBC Phase 3 Training; 2 students were in ACBC Phase 2 Training; and 2 students had completed the ACBC 30-hour Basic Training Course.

contained a thirty-question survey with a six-point Likert scale.⁹ The survey was securely hosted on the online program Formstack.¹⁰ The final survey was turned in on Tuesday, August 4. Sample questions from the thirty-question survey are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Sample questions from the pre-course assessment

Number	Question
Q1	I have a specific counseling plan in place to minister to those who are grieving over the loss of a loved one.
Q8	I am able to name specific ways that a widow's life changes in the first six months after losing a spouse.
Q29	I can instruct a parent in the relational skills necessary to build up their relationship with adult children.

A Likert scale was used to measure students' competence in these issues according to the following measurements: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; DS = disagree somewhat; AS = agree somewhat; A = agree; and SA = strongly agree. After the pre-course surveys were completed, numeric values were assigned to the values of the Likert scale. The values 1 to 6 were assigned in ascending order from 1 (SD, strongly disagree) to 6 (SA, strongly agree). The mean score per question was 3.47.¹¹ This score indicated general comprehension across all thirty questions and all twelve students rated somewhere between "disagree somewhat" and "agree somewhat."

Final Preparations

The final week of preparation (August 3-7) was spent writing the course lecture presentation and creating case study counseling scenarios that would be used in the role play counseling sessions. Twelve counseling case studies were compiled to form the

⁹ See appendix 5.

¹⁰ The option was given to each student to either fill out the form using Formstack or manually fill out an emailed document. Eleven class participants filled out the pre-course assessment using Formstack. One student opted to fill out the survey using the emailed document.

¹¹ See appendix 6 for full pre-test results. Once the values were assigned, the scores were added up across twelve surveys, then divided by the number of questions (30) and then further divided by the number of surveys (12).

basis for the role play sessions. The case studies were adapted from real-life scenarios that had been observed in the fifteen interview sessions, as well as examples that had been observed in the research materials used in the preparation of the curriculum. The role play assignments were given to each student before the weekend training program. Each student would play both the counselor and the counselee once during the course of the weekend.

Because of governmental restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was taught entirely in an online format. I decided that scheduling the twelve-hour training program in a weekend seminar would be more conducive to full participation than covering the same material over a number of weeks. Eight lectures were scheduled to be taught in a livestream format utilizing the video equipment at the church. In addition, four interactive role play sessions were conducted using a Zoom webinar platform.¹² The sessions were streamed on the church's web platform.¹³ Chat functionality allowed class participants to give feedback during the course lectures.

Implementation

The third goal of this ministry project was to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers. This goal was achieved through the teaching of a live counseling seminar which began on Friday, August 7 at 6:00 p.m., and concluded on Sunday, August 9 at 4:30 p.m. The counseling seminar included twelve hours of structured instruction. Eight hours of teaching were given in a lecture format and four hours were dedicated to interactive counseling role play.

¹² See appendix 7 for a detailed class schedule.

¹³ Livestream sessions for the church are hosted at the website: live.kindredchurch.org.

Lecture Instruction

Lesson 1: “Biblically Evaluating ‘Midlife Crisis.’” The goal of this session was to introduce the concept of “middle age” as well as introduce the number of specific pressures encountered in midlife. These pressures include physical limitations, parenting difficulties, marital struggles, caring for aging parents, singleness as a middle-aged believer, vocational disillusionment, and relational grieving. After introducing the specific pressures of middle age, the “Three Tree Diagram” based on Jeremiah 17:7-8 was used as the basis for a proposed understanding of “midlife crisis.”¹⁴ The secular perspective on “midlife crisis” was contrasted with a biblical view of human behavior that focuses on the dynamics of the heart (Matt 15:18-20). In midlife crisis, certain elements of the “Heart” issues in a counselee’s life may bring out specific “Heart” issues that have been untouched for some time. The exposure of certain heart issues may be the source of many of the extreme behaviors observed in middle age. The lecture ended with a practical plan for counseling those experiencing midlife crisis. This plan emphasized the ministry of expressing compassion, giving hope to the counselee, and skillfully using Scripture to address heart issues.

Lesson 2: “Processing Grief after You’ve Lost a Loved One.” The need for this session was demonstrated from the fact that believers lose loved ones as they progress through middle age. This lesson surveyed the secular perspective on processing grief with the biblical view of walking with God in seasons of sorrow. The “five stages of grief” articulated by secular psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was contrasted with a biblical approach to experiencing sanctification in a season of grieving. A practical counseling plan for ministering to the grieving was also communicated with an emphasis on (1) being present; (2) listening well; (3) waiting patiently; and (4) giving hope to those

¹⁴ See appendix 8. I learned the “Three Tree Diagram” (CCEF) from Robert Jones in the “Introduction to Biblical Counseling” doctoral seminar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I incorporated this diagram into the ACBC Year 1 Training at Kindred Community Church. Because of their previous training in biblical counseling, each class participant in this seminar was already acquainted with the Three Tree Diagram and familiar with applying it in counseling scenarios.

experiencing sorrow. The goal of counseling is not the elimination of sorrow but the strengthening of the counselee's relationship with the Lord through seasons of grieving. The students were then instructed in the psalms of lament and encouraged to use these psalms in their counseling ministry with grieving people. The lecture concluded with some special considerations for ministering to those who had endured the painful experiences of miscarriage, abortion, or losing a loved one due to suicide.

Lesson 3: "Understanding Marriage Dynamics after Twenty-Five Years."

A number of resources are written on marriage, but comparatively fewer resources target the struggles and joys of marriage in this stage of life. Marriage in middle age can face specific temptations that were not characteristic of the early years of marriage. The unique pressures and temptations common to marriage in this life stage include physical changes, personality differences, experiencing the "empty nest," caring for aging parents, watching adult children struggle, and experiencing seasons of grief. Each of these life pressures can serve to draw a married couple closer together or threaten the unity of the one-flesh relationship. The "Three Tree Diagram" was adapted to serve as a basis for marriage counseling, with two trees representing the married couple and a sun representing the "Heat" of life. This lesson did not propose any new principles that could be applied to marriage but encouraged a fresh understanding of specific applications of biblical principles to the unique circumstances of middle age. For example, the biblical truths related to conflict resolution in marriage are the same principles that could be taught to a newly married couple. However, the application of those principles may be different for a person married twenty-five years who has to deal with a long-standing pattern of offenses and grievances.

Lesson 4: "Parenting Adult Children." The season of relating to children as adults may be longer than the season of parenting dependent children. The skills required to parent adult children are different than the skills required to parent young children.

Parenting adult children requires excellent relational skills and the ability to accept a child for who they are. The goal in parenting adult children is influence, not control. Many parents struggle to make this transition in the parenting relationship and struggle to relate to their adult children. The specific issues that may be encountered in middle age include relating to the “Adultolescent,” adult children who come to live back home, experiencing “Empty Nest Syndrome,” relating to unbelieving adult children, relating to spouses of adult children, children who experience divorce, and specific issues that pertain to grandparenting. An overview of the specific heart issues in middle-aged parents include guilt, regret, disappointment, envy, anger, and control. The students were encouraged to be aware of these specific “Heart” issues and “Heart” issues and minister skillfully to people in this stage of life. The lesson ended with practical steps for ministering to parents of adult children. In addition to addressing the heart issues of parents, students were encouraged to help counselees develop the relational skills needed in this stage of parenting.

Lesson 5: “Singleness as a Middle-Aged Believer in the Church.” The categories of single people in the Bible include the unmarried, the divorced, the widowed, the single by calling, and single parents. Generally, resources directed to strengthening single believers in the church are fewer and less prominent than resources directed toward strengthening marriages. Middle-aged singles can find it difficult to find fellowship and companionship in the church. In addition, single believers can struggle with loneliness and a desire to be married (although not all experience this to the same degree). The pursuit of a spouse and the dating life can be complicated in the season of middle age. The current practice of online dating has both increased opportunities and increased risks. The apostle Paul declares that the state of singleness is good (1 Cor 7:7-8). In some ways, singleness is an advantageous state (1 Cor 7:32-35). The New Testament emphasizes the priority of the spiritual family of God (Matt 12:46-50).

This lesson concluded with a practical approach to counseling single believers who are middle-aged. This approach emphasized the discipline of careful inventory, addressing heart issues, and encouraging involvement in the local church. Considerations regarding dating were briefly discussed. Each counselee must be treated as a unique individual; there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to counseling single believers.

Lesson 6: “Transitioning to Life as a Widow in the Church.” God’s special concern for widows is made clear from a number of Old Testament passages (Ps 68:5, 146:9). The theme of caring for widows is extended into the New Testament where Paul instructs the church to “honor widows who are truly widows” (1 Tim 5:3). A widow experiences a number of transitions: emotional, financial, social, and spiritual. The challenges that a widow faces in the first year after losing a spouse are different from the challenges faced long-term after that first year. A wise biblical counselor is equipped to understand these transitions and to demonstrate biblical compassion for the counselee. In addition, a wise biblical counselor is ideally equipped to address specific counseling issues in a widow’s life, including forgiveness, isolation, vulnerability, and decision-making. The counselor should be prepared to have informed conversations about the numerous practical decisions that a widow needs to make, including short-term matters such as how to make funeral arrangements and also long-term issues such as how to choose a vocation. The counselor’s role is not to be an expert in these matters or to give authoritative guidance on matters not specifically addressed in Scripture. At the same time, the ability to engage in intelligent conversation on these matters can aid the counselor’s ministry to the counselee.

Lesson 7: “Dealing with Chronic Illness and/or Chronic Pain.” Believers in middle age are more susceptible to physical illness than those in their younger years. The causes of chronic pain in a believer’s life were identified and discussed. A physical injury such as a back or head injury can be the cause of long-term physical pain. Chronic illnesses

such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, lupus, or diabetes can be the cause of lifestyle limitations in midlife. Special considerations should be given in this topic to the issues of infertility, long-term disability, and the specific struggles that caregivers face in ministering to the ill. The biblical example of Job was used to enforce the idea that God's purposes in suffering are not always immediately apparent. In addition, the negative example of Job's counselors was used as an illustration of what not to say to suffering people. This lesson ended with a practical guide to counseling people with a chronic illness. Special emphasis was given to the task of entering the counselee's world and demonstrating Christ-like compassion. The counselor should take consider all of the ramifications of a physical illness, which include vocational, marital, and financial stresses. "Heart" issues such as grief, guilt, loneliness, and despair may be identified by the counselor through the course of conversation. The counselor should gently help the counselee embrace a biblical perspective on pain and suffering.

Lesson 8: "Caring for Aging Parents." The Bible calls on believers to honor the aged, and to give special consideration to the honoring of one's parents (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Prov 23:22). The Bible especially highlights the believer's responsibility to care for widows in the family (1 Tim 5:4). Jesus provided an example of caring for his mother even in the midst of his physical sufferings on the cross (John 19:26-27). The middle-aged believer who desires to obey these biblical principles will fulfill a responsibility that glorifies God but at the same time requires much sacrifice. In middle age, the believer may be caught between the two competing pressures of caring for aging parents and caring for dependent children. This can cause the "Heart" issues in a counselee's life to be quite intense. In addition, the season of caring for aging parents can be long. Believers are often unprepared for the numerous financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual demands in this season of life. A wise biblical counselor will be aware that a caregiver can struggle with weariness, resentment, and guilt. One of the goals of counseling should be for the counselee's heart to be strengthened by the promises of God in Scripture. Therefore, the

biblical counselor should be well-acquainted with the promises of God and able to use those promises to encourage weary hearts.

Counseling Role Play

In addition to the eight hours of lecture instruction, the seminar scheduled four sessions of one hour each dedicated to role play of counseling scenarios. These role play sessions were conducted over the Zoom webinar platform. Two sessions were scheduled for Saturday morning and another two were scheduled for Sunday afternoon. Each one-hour session was divided into three, twenty-minute segments. The counselor had fifteen minutes to demonstrate the basic elements of a counseling session. Five minutes were allotted for instructor feedback and transition to the next counselor. Twelve students were in the class, and each student had the opportunity to play the role of the counselor once and the counselee once. Students were given the following general template to demonstrate the essential skills of a biblical counselor:

Table 4. Template for fifteen-minute role play assignment

Step	Activity	Time Length
1	Open in prayer	--
2	Ask 3-4 Inventory questions	7 minutes
3	Empathize and give hope	3 minutes
4	Open to one passage of Scripture Explain and give one application	5 minutes
5	Close in prayer	--

Students were instructed that they would not be able to fully express all of the counseling skills normally demonstrated in a sixty-minute counseling session. The goal of the role play was to express a practical skill set of the ability to ask good questions, listen well, give hope, and also give instruction in God’s Word. The case study scenarios given to the students were built around the topics discussed in the course. Twelve

counseling scenarios were prepared for these sessions which focused on counseling issues related to middle-age.¹⁵

The students participating in the counseling role play sessions were evaluated by me using a rubric to evaluate the practical skills of the counselor.¹⁶ The students received high marks for their counseling skills. The mean score per evaluation criteria was 3.84, indicating that the general evaluation of counseling skills was rated closest to “exemplary.”¹⁷ Students especially excelled in the areas of listening skills, ability to express Christ-like compassion, ability to impart biblical hope, and use of Scripture in their counseling sessions. While all students demonstrated a sufficient working knowledge of the basic skills in counseling, the students with greater training and experience demonstrated an even higher level of competence and ability.¹⁸ This was expected due to the differing training profiles of the students as explained previously in this chapter. All twelve students received an average score of “sufficient” or above on the evaluation rubric, with seven students receiving the average score of “exemplary.”¹⁹

Description of Follow-up Period

Post-Course Survey

On Sunday, August 9, a post-course survey was distributed electronically to the twelve class participants. This survey contained the same questions as was asked of

¹⁵ See appendix 9 for a summary of the twelve counseling scenarios.

¹⁶ See appendix 10.

¹⁷ See appendix 11 for full results of counseling skills evaluation. The scoring options on the rubric were 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

¹⁸ See appendix 11, table A6, for results pertaining to students who are active in the formal counseling ministry (ACBC Certified Biblical Counselors and students participating in ACBC Phase 3 Training).

¹⁹ Seven students received an average rating of 4.00 (“exemplary”) on their evaluation rubric. The average rating of the other five students was 3.33 (above “sufficient”).

the students in the Pre-Course Assessment on August 1.²⁰ This survey was designed to measure the student's knowledge and competence in addressing issues specific to middle-aged believers after participating in the training program. This survey contained a thirty-question survey with a six-point Likert scale and was securely hosted on the online program Formstack.²¹ The final survey was turned in on Wednesday, August 12.

After the post-course surveys were completed, numeric values were assigned to the values of the Likert scale. The values 1 to 6 were assigned in ascending order from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), in the same way as the pre-course survey. The mean score per question was 5.43.²² This score indicated that general comprehension across all thirty questions and all twelve students was rated somewhere between "agree" and "strongly agree." Additional analysis of the data will be provided in chapter 5.

Mobilization Plan

The fourth goal of this ministry project was to develop a mobilization plan for each participant to apply the training material in counseling ministry. This plan was designed to move the student from the learning of material to the application of those principles in the ministry context of Kindred Community Church. Students who are actively counseling as part of the biblical counseling ministry at Kindred Community Church were encouraged to utilize their training in organized counseling sessions. Students who are not currently participating in formal counseling sessions were instructed to utilize the content of their training in informal relationships and shepherding opportunities that exist within the church. To aid the students in the development of their

²⁰ See appendix 5.

²¹ As with the pre-course survey, the option was given to each of the students to either fill out the form using Formstack or manually fill out an emailed document. Eleven class participants filled out the pre-course assessment using Formstack. One student opted to fill out the survey using the emailed document.

²² See appendix 6 for full post-test results. As with the pre-course survey, the scores were added up across twelve surveys, then divided by the number of questions (30) and then further divided by the number of surveys (12).

mobilization plans, a two-page mobilization plan template was provided for the class with clear expectations of what their plan should entail.²³ Each student was encouraged to be as specific as possible as to applications they would be making in ministry settings.

The mobilization templates were distributed prior to the course instruction on August 4.²⁴ Students were encouraged to think about how they would fill out the template as they listened to the lectures of the course. All twelve students filled out a mobilization plan and the final plan was turned in on August 12. The plans were then sent to an expert panel made up of three ordained pastors. The selection of this expert panel was different from the panel used to evaluate the training curriculum. This difference was due to the practical nature of the mobilization plans. The plans needed to produce useful ministry in the local church that any pastor could discern and appreciate, not just instructors who had specialized roles within the field of biblical counseling. The ministry profiles for these pastors are outlined in table 5.

Table 5. Expert panel of ordained pastors

Name	Ministry Position	Church
Jason Erselius	Executive Pastor	Kindred Community Church Anaheim, CA
Dave Doyle	Pastor of Ministry Development	Kindred Community Church Anaheim, CA
Patrick Cho	Senior Pastor	Lighthouse Bible Church San Diego, CA

Each expert panel member filled out an evaluation rubric and returned it the following week.²⁵ The final evaluation was received on Monday, August 17. The students received high marks for their mobilization plans. The mean score per evaluation criteria was 3.93, indicating that the general evaluation of the mobilization plans was

²³ See appendix 12.

²⁴ See appendix 12.

²⁵ See appendix 13.

rated closest to “exemplary.”²⁶ Each of the twelve mobilization plans received a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meeting or exceeding the sufficiency level.

Conclusion

The initial feedback from the counseling seminar was positive. Class participants expressed that they were much better equipped to understand the struggles experienced in the middle-aged population of the church. One student stated, “It was so wonderful to gain understanding and wisdom for helping one another in dealing with the issues that come to middle-aged believers.”²⁷ Another student said, “I know I will be revisiting this often for many years to come and drawing so much from all that we’ve learned.”²⁸ The initial assessment was that the training program fulfilled its purpose. Further substantiation that the goals of this ministry project were achieved will be presented in the next chapter.

²⁶ See appendix 14 for full results of the mobilization plan evaluations. The scoring options on the rubric were 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

²⁷ Email from student received August 9, 2020. Used with permission.

²⁸ Email from student received August 9, 2020. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF MINISTRY PROJECT

From 2011 to 2020, the biblical counseling ministry at Kindred Community Church was developed in partnership with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). Church members were trained in the principles of biblical counseling and application to issues such as anger, anxiety, depression, and conflict resolution. The focus of this ministry project was to add an additional level of specialized training to the program already in operation at the church. This project took the principles of biblical counseling and applied them to the specific issues faced by middle-aged believers in Christ. In chapter 4, the details of the project's development and implementation were recorded. This chapter will evaluate the fulfillment of the project's purpose and goals and also assess the strengths and the weaknesses of the ministry project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. This purpose was achieved through the development and the implementation of a twelve-hour training program taught live at the church the weekend of August 7-9, 2020. The class curriculum addressed eight of the counseling issues which were ranked to be the most pressing struggles in the middle-aged membership of the church. Four hours of the program were dedicated to counseling role play sessions designed to evaluate the students' skills in counseling ministry. The class presented practical ways that counselors could more effectively minister to believers in this age range. The students then created a mobilization plan that would move them from the learning of the material to practical application in the ministry contexts at Kindred Community Church. It is my assessment that the purpose

of the ministry project was fulfilled. Further substantiation will be found by evaluating the project's specific goals using a clearly defined research methodology.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The ministry project established four goals designed to measure the effectiveness of the training program. The first goal was to discover the current issues being experienced by the middle-aged members of Kindred Community Church. I accomplished this goal by surveying the middle-aged population of Kindred Community Church as to their assessment of potential counseling issues. I also accomplished this goal by conducting fifteen interviews with church members in this age range. This goal was considered met if 100 members of the church participated in the survey and 15 interviews were conducted. At the close of the preparation phase of this project, I received a total of 123 surveys and conducted 15 interviews. A careful consideration of both the survey responses and the information obtained from the interviews yielded a clearer understanding of the issues being experienced by the middle-aged population at the church. The first goal is considered to have been successfully met.

The second goal was to develop a twelve-session curriculum that would equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. I accomplished this goal by creating a curriculum entitled "Counseling Middle-Aged Believers in the Church." This curriculum was sixty-two pages in length and addressed eight potential counseling topics from a biblical perspective. An additional four hours of role play counseling sessions were organized so that students could demonstrate their practical skills in counseling. The topics addressed in the curriculum were chosen in light of the data obtained from the survey responses and the completed interviews. I submitted the written curriculum to a four-person expert panel of instructors in biblical counseling and ordained pastors who were each certified by the ACBC. This goal was considered to have been successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the

evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. The evaluations exceeded the 90 percent criteria.¹ The second goal is considered to have been successfully met.

The third goal was to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-age believers. I fulfilled this goal by teaching the twelve-hour curriculum in a live, interactive class setting. Twelve students were enrolled in the course. Each of the students had some previous training in biblical counseling and four of the students were ACBC certified biblical counselors. I conducted a pre-course survey and post-course survey to measure the progress students made in the course. The surveys contained an identical thirty questions designed to measure the students' understanding of counseling issues related to middle age. The goal was considered met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-training survey scores: ($t_{(11)} = -7.08, p < .0001$).² Additionally, I observed students practicing their counseling skills in role play scenarios and determined their level of competency utilizing an evaluation rubric. The criteria used to evaluate competency included the ability to ask purposeful questions, display of verbal and non-verbal skills, demonstration of Christ-like empathy and compassion, and faithful representation of the meaning of Scripture. The students all demonstrated a basic competency in the practical skills necessary for effective counseling ministry. The evaluations exceeded the 90 percent criteria.³ The third goal is considered to have been successfully met.

The fourth goal was to develop a mobilization plan for each participant to apply the training material in counseling ministry. This plan was designed to mobilize the student to apply the class material in specific ministry contexts at Kindred Community Church. Those who were actively counseling as part of the biblical counseling ministry at Kindred

¹ See appendix 4 for full results of the curriculum review.

² See appendix 15.

³ See appendix 11 for the full results of the counseling evaluations.

Community Church were instructed to apply this training in their organized counseling sessions. Class participants who were not yet formally counseling as part of the counseling ministry were guided to apply the lessons in informal relationships and other shepherding opportunities in the church. Each of the twelve students completed a mobilization plan. The plans were measured by an expert panel consisting of three ordained pastors actively ministering in a local church. The criteria used to evaluate the mobilization plans included applicability to the specific spiritual needs of the church, integration with ministries outside of the counseling ministry, and practical nature of the mobilization plan. The evaluations exceeded the 90 percent criteria.⁴ The fourth goal is considered to have been successfully met.

My evaluation is that the implementation of the ministry project achieved the project goals and that this assessment can be supported using a clearly defined research methodology. The project fulfilled its purpose to train biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. The project aided in the fulfillment of the church's mission, which is to "glorify God by making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ."

Strengths of the Project

One of the strengths of the project was my personal motivation to teach this course. When the development of the project was initiated, I was entering into the life stage called "middle age." I had been married nearly twenty-five years and my children were heading into adulthood. While I had not been diagnosed with any major chronic illness, I was beginning to experience some of the physical limitations of midlife. At the same time, I was counseling a number of believers in my church who were in the middle-aged life stage and struggling through a number of the issues that were eventually addressed in my curriculum. As a pastor in a local church I had a heart for this age group

⁴ See appendix 14 for the full results of the mobilization plan evaluations.

and wanted to be better equipped to minister effectively to the members of my church. While I benefited tremendously from a number of biblical counseling resources, I found it challenging to apply some of these resources to the specific issues encountered in midlife. For these reasons, I was personally motivated to research, write, and teach on the subject of counseling middle-aged believers in Christ. I believe the training program benefited from this personal motivation.

A second strength of the project was the inclusion of member interviews during the preparation phase of the ministry project. I greatly enjoyed these interviews because each of these members was part of my church and I enjoyed hearing their life stories. I realized that asking targeted questions in these interviews allowed me to learn about the members of my church in a unique format. Members shared freely and openly about their struggles. I was surprised to find during the course of the interviews that the topic of “Caring for Aging Parents” was such a pressing issue in the church. Many commented that this was a stressful season of life that is not often talked about in the church. Interviewees shared about personal sacrifices made over the course of years in order to be faithful to care for aging parents. This ministry project would not have been the same without the inclusion of these interviews. These conversations enabled me to prepare the curriculum with the practical needs of the church body in mind. I enjoyed these fifteen interviews so much that I added a sixteenth (informal) interview to prepare for the topic of “Transitioning to Life as a Widow in the Church.” This additional conversation was with the leader of the widows’ fellowship of my church. The hour-long dialogue was tremendously helpful in developing my understanding of a widow’s experience. Previously, I had not considered how useful the tool of interviewing would be in preparing for teaching classes in the church. I learned from this project to include the practice of interviews in future preparation for teaching in the church.

A third strength of the project was the enrollment of twelve students in the course who were highly motivated to learn the material. I had a previous pastoral

relationship with each of these students, and they had each been in my biblical counseling classes in the church. The fact that four of the students were already ACBC certified and that all of the students had at least received the ACBC Basic Training course meant that I could go much deeper in the lectures than if I were teaching this to a general audience on Sunday mornings. As an instructor, I was happy to find that I did not need to defend the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in relation to counseling ministry and that I did not need to introduce practical counseling tools such as the “Three Tree Diagram.” These concepts had already been learned by the students. Instead, I could spend the class time bringing fresh and specific application of these concepts to the specific issues encountered in middle age. The students who were active in formal counseling ministry were especially desirous to learn the material because they were dealing with these issues in their own counseling ministry. Because the students were highly motivated, I was able to require 100 percent participation in the classes and not give an option for make-up work. The level of high commitment on behalf of the class students created a camaraderie between the students and a culture of eager learning and participation.

A fourth strength of the project was the implementation of counseling role play sessions to demonstrate the students’ practical skill in counseling ministry. I had never implemented role play in any of my classes before and did not know what the results of these sessions would be. I had been concerned that the students would feel uncomfortable acting out certain role play situations in front of a group, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that my concerns had been unfounded. The role play sessions ended up becoming one of the highlights of the course. Students had the opportunity to play both the role of the counselor and the counselee. The students made an eager personal commitment to act out the full emotional range of the role, which caused the role play counseling sessions to come to life. When the students played the role of the counselor, they demonstrated admirable counseling skills. The majority of the counselors excelled in their use of Scripture, compassionate demeanor, and ability to ask insightful, skillful questions. The

role play counseling also served to illustrate the course material as each of the scenarios were built around one of the counseling issues presented in the course. One student wrote, “The joy of being in a class like this doing role playing with one another was a new experience within our biblical counseling team. I loved it!”⁵ I learned from this experience that counseling role play is invaluable in training future counselors in the church.

A fifth strength of the project was the online format. Teaching online was not my preferred method of instruction as I have always taught classes in a live classroom setting; however, I found that the online format had distinct advantages. Teaching online freed me to concentrate on the material and ensure optimum communication of the curriculum content. In a classroom format, I am typically distracted by issues such as room temperature, snacks and coffee, classroom set-up and students asking for personal counsel during breaks. Due to these issues, I struggle at times to start and end class on time. In the online format, I found it easier to stay focused on delivering an hour of quality content in each session and keeping the class on time in each session. I also found it easier to schedule the class over the weekend without worrying about traffic patterns, which would usually delay a number of class members. Utilizing the church’s audio-visual equipment ensured the professional quality of both the audio and the video content. While I will never want to move entirely to an online format in teaching classes, I found that this delivery format could be a useful tool to utilize in future counseling classes.

Weaknesses of the Project

One weakness of the project was the limited amount of time to address the counseling issues related to middle age. As one member of the expert panel observed, “This was a great introduction covering many topics. I’d love to see additional depth in a future ‘advanced’ version. Each one of these topics is worthy of its own volume.” While the eight selected counseling topics covered a broad range of struggles encountered in

⁵ Email from student received August 9, 2020. Used with permission.

middle age, each of those topics contain sub-topics that could be further developed in a larger curriculum. For example, I only had one hour to address the topic of “Singleness as a Middle-Aged Believer in the Church.” Yet within the broader category of singleness are sub-topics that could be addressed, such as ministering to the divorced, encouraging single parents, evaluating the “gift of singleness,” and issues related to pursuing marriage in middle age. Each of those topics could warrant their own hour of dedicated discussion and teaching. Survey participants ranked the topic of “Financial Issues during the Middle Age Years” as number 7 out of 12 in terms of perceived importance. Yet because of time and space constraints I chose not to include that topic in the curriculum. I would have loved to address that issue as well as consider the topic of “Preparing for Retirement” in the course curriculum. The topic of preparing spiritually and financially for retirement is a subject that warrants its own curriculum.

Another weakness of the project was the limited amount of time dedicated to role play counseling. Fitting twelve role play scenarios into a four-hour timeframe necessitated that each role play run approximately fifteen minutes. I would have like to have seen each counselor conduct a longer session of role play counseling to better simulate the flow of a typical counseling session. It also would have been helpful to see a counseling session in which a married couple counseled another married couple in issues related to middle age. Observing the dynamics between spouses in a counseling session would have been instructive for the class. If time permitted, I could have allowed the class to give feedback regarding the strengths and the weaknesses of each counseling session. Because of time constraints, I was the only one to give feedback on the counseling sessions. Utilizing a role play session like this could lead to valuable discussion regarding the practical counseling skills each counselor needs to develop and utilize. It also could serve to reinforce key lessons from the curriculum as biblical principles are illustrated and applied.

A third weakness of the project was the limitations inherent to the online format. I previously stated that the online format became a strength in the efficient delivery of course content, but in the end, nothing substitutes for face-to-face interaction. In a live setting, students develop relationships with one another as they hear live instruction and fellowship with one another during breaks. They are able to hear each other's questions, comments, and replies as they work through the course material together with the instructor. I believe the students enjoyed the online format and appreciated its ease and flexibility; however, I would be hesitant to adopt the online model as the exclusive means of delivering course content. Perhaps a hybrid model that incorporates online delivery and classroom instruction could maximize the strengths of both models for future counseling classes. The restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the movement toward online education. This movement will need to be carefully evaluated as it relates to training programs in the local church.

What I Would Do Differently

The first thing that I would have done differently is to assign both pre-course and post-course reading for students in the class. While the students were acquainted with the basic principles of biblical counseling, they were not familiar with the literature that addressed issues pertaining to middle age. I would have wanted to acquaint them with literature written from a biblical counseling perspective. I also would have liked them to read at least one work written from a Christian integrationist perspective for critique purposes. A reading assignment could have been produced that asked the student to read five books pertaining to the issues of middle age.⁶ This reading could have enriched and deepened the students' learning experience in the course.

The second thing that I would have done differently would be to seek to enroll more male students in the course. The twelve students were comprised of nine female

⁶ A suggested reading assignment is found at appendix 16.

students and three male students. This enrollment is reflective of the general trend of more females than males pursuing biblical counseling training in the church.⁷ I rejoice in the faithfulness of the female counselors at my church, yet the church is also in need of qualified men who are able to faithfully handle the Word of God and make application to the issues of life. The course would have been served well to have four to six male students who were learning about issues related to middle age and carefully thinking through these issues with biblical discernment. Perhaps the goal of enrolling more men in the course could have been a matter of concentrated prayer. The church needs more men to pursue the ministry of biblical counseling because many men need such counseling. This is an issue to think through as the biblical counseling ministry continues to move into the future and grow at the church.

Theological Reflections

This project was founded upon the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). After studying the issues related to middle age, I am firmly convinced that God has given to the believer “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). The pressures and challenges related to middle age are part of the “various trials” (Jas 1:3) ordained by God to progressively conform the believer to the likeness of Christ (Rom 5:3-5, 8:29). Middle age is a season in which the believer experiences the refining of one’s faith (1 Pet 1:7). God ordains that the believer experience certain “Heat” issues in middle age, including physical limitations, parenting difficulties, marital struggles, singleness as a middle-aged believer, vocational disillusionment, and emotional grieving. Yet, God uses those pressures and difficulties to

⁷ As of August 18, 2020, 3 male counselors are ACBC certified at the church and 5 female counselors are ACBC certified. The ACBC Phase 3 training had an additional 1 male counselor and 3 female counselors actively ministering at the church.

reveal the believer's true heart condition and to purify the heart's devotion to Christ (Ps 86:11; Jas 4:8). The biblical counselor's goal in coming alongside the counselee is not the elimination of trials but the pursuit of Christlikeness (Phil 3:13-14). The biblical counselor must be armed with the knowledge of the Scriptures to minister effectively to the hearts of believers. Only the Scriptures can address the issues of the heart (Heb 4:12-13). Only the Scriptures can transform the soul (Ps 19:7-9).

This project reinforced the need for biblical counselors to be compassionate. Jesus saw that people were like sheep without a shepherd and His response was striking: "He had compassion on them" (Matt 9:36). Compassion is a quality that biblical counselors must exemplify because they minister to people living in a broken world (Rom 8:22-23). Surveying the difficulties encountered by believers in middle age should equip the counselor to sympathize with the counselee's struggles. One class participant wrote in her mobilization plan, "In general, this seminar helped me to see the gravity (hotter 'heat') of the issues in the middle age of life. . . . It has grown my compassion for the counselee's in this stage of life that I will counsel as the Lord provides opportunity." Counselees in this age range experience grief, physical pain, heartbreak due to rebellious children, loneliness, major life transitions, and vocational disillusionment. Before the biblical counselor can help with the problem, he or she must see the person in the midst of the situation. Paul Tripp writes, "Biblical personal ministry certainly includes problem solving, but it must be person-focused. God's work of change certainly involves changes in situation and relationship, but it has radical personal transformation as its core goal."⁸ Biblical counseling is relational ministry. Counselors must be armed with truth and also be motivated by love (Eph 4:15). Understanding the specific pressures of middle age can help the biblical counselor demonstrate true compassion for those struggling with the issues of life.

⁸ Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 126.

I was struck at how the common theme in issues related to middle age is that the Lord is always seeking to sanctify the believer's heart. It is out of the heart that "flow[s] the springs of life" (Prov 4:23). God wants the believer's heart to be undivided and pure (Ps 73:1, 86:11). God desires true worship that comes from a devoted heart (Matt 15:8-9). When ruling desires become the authority in a believer's heart, the result is conflict, quarreling, and every vile practice (Jas 3:16, 4:1-2). These desires need to be identified and submitted to the Lord (Jas 4:6-10). But a trusting heart is a quiet heart (Ps 131:1-3), and a quiet heart is filled with strength (Is 30:15). Out of this trusting heart the true fruit of righteousness grows and flourishes, even in seasons of difficulty. The man who "trusts in the LORD" need not fear the pressures of life, for he will not "cease to bear fruit" even when the heat comes (Jer 17:7-8). While the pressures of life grow more complex in middle age, the believer in Christ is filled with great hope. These pressures can be used by the Lord to produce in the believer greater sanctification and holiness. Christ will be faithful to the believer in middle age. Isaiah 46:4 says, "Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will care you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." The biblical counselor must be armed with God's truth and be able to skillfully minister to the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

Personal Reflections

The idea for a biblical counseling curriculum dealing with issues specific to middle-aged believers in Christ was first suggested to me in January of 2017 by Robert Jones at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In his Doctor of Ministry Seminar on Marriage and Family Counseling, Jones remarked that not many resources address the struggles of middle age from a biblical counseling perspective. I remember returning from that seminar and performing a basic evaluation of the counseling needs of Kindred Community Church. I observed that approximately one-third of the church members were in the age range which could be called "middle age." It appeared that a training program that addressed the counseling needs of this age range would both advance the training of

the counselors at Kindred and create resources for the church that were not otherwise available.

Almost four years later, I look back and I thank the Lord for sustaining me through the completion of this project. While I began this project looking over the precipice of entry into this season called “middle age,” I am now a few years into this new classification of life. I look forward to how the Lord will draw me to Himself in the years to come. While the completion of this project was delayed for a year due to ministry obligations, I thank the Lord for the extra year of refinement and maturing that led to what I believe is a better curriculum. In some ways, the counselors at my church needed an extra year to be ready for this teaching, and I needed an extra year to be prepared to teach it. God’s timing is perfect in all of these matters.

A twelve-hour training program that addresses the issues of middle-aged believers in Christ merely scratches the surface of the need for specialized resources directed toward the issues specific to middle age. Each of the topics covered in this curriculum could become full curriculums in their own right. This says nothing about the resources that could be produced to address issues specific to other age groups. It strikes me that at this juncture of the history of the biblical counseling movement, so much work has been completed to the glory of God and yet, as always, there is still work to be done. The foundation of sound theology and practical methodology has been laid that brings counseling into the center of the local church. Now the task remains to apply that foundation to the unique struggles encountered in every season of life.

Conclusion

It has been a rich and rewarding experience to research and write on the topic of “Counseling Middle-Aged Believers in Christ.” This process has refined and sharpened my thinking on how the biblical counseling model for helping people change can be applied to the issues of a specific age group. There are no new truths, there are only the old truths of Scripture. Yet, in every season of life there are new and fresh applications of

biblical truth to the new and unfolding circumstances of life. After studying this topic I have a greater appreciation of the struggles of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I also have a greater understanding of the spiritual opportunities that middle age presents, and the ministry opportunities that exist to encourage believers in the Lord.

May the Lord multiply the fruitfulness of the ministry of His Word so that the shepherding care of Christ would be experienced by every member of His church. And may the ministry of biblical counseling be used to this end: “to glorify God by making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ.”

APPENDIX 1

COUNSELING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is a Counseling Needs Assessment. The first part contains a twelve-question survey with a five-point Likert scale. The second part contains three blanks that can be filled by a choice between twelve options. In addition to the twelve options, an “Other” option is provided with the opportunity to fill in a blank with a written response. The third part gives an open-ended prompt where the participant can record additional comments. The instrument’s purpose was to determine the perceived counseling issues which are most prominent in the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church. The envisioned goal of utilizing this instrument was to rank a number of possible counseling issues in order of perceived significance. The survey was distributed online and the results were received electronically. If the response rate failed to meet a designated threshold, then paper copies would have been distributed in small group settings until the threshold was reached.

COUNSELING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the counseling needs of the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church. For the purposes of this project, “middle-aged” is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 1 Directions: The following is a list of twelve counseling issues. Please rate each issue in relation to how significant you feel this issue is in the middle-aged community of Kindred Community Church (ages 45-65). Please rate each issue according to your perceived importance, taking into account people you know in this age range.

- 1 = Not at all important
- 2 = Slightly important
- 3 = Moderately important
- 4 = Very Important
- 5 = Extremely important

1. Transitioning to the “empty nest”	1	2	3	4	5
2. Dealing with chronic illness and/or chronic pain	1	2	3	4	5
3. How to relate to adult children	1	2	3	4	5
4. Living with prolonged infertility	1	2	3	4	5
5. Processing grief after you’ve lost a loved one	1	2	3	4	5
6. Understanding marriage dynamics after 25 years	1	2	3	4	5
7. Singleness as a middle-aged believer in the church	1	2	3	4	5

8.	Caring for aging parents and/or chronically ill loved ones	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Experiencing “midlife crisis”	1	2	3	4	5
10	Transitioning to life as a widow in the church	1	2	3	4	5
11	Relating to adult children who have come back to live at home	1	2	3	4	5
12	Financial issues during the middle-age years	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2 Directions: Speaking from your personal experience, please identify the top three issues that have directly impacted your life. Please rank them in order of personal relevance, with #1 being the most relevant to your personal experience. If there is an issue not listed that is more relevant to your experience, please select “other” and fill in the blank with your personal response.¹

1. _____ [Drop-down menu of 12 options]

Other: _____

2. _____ [Drop-down menu of 12 options]

Other: _____

3. _____ [Drop-down menu of 12 options]

Other: _____

Part 3 Directions: From your perspective, are there any other counseling issues that are significant to the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church (age 45-65)? If so, please name in the blank below. If there are no other issues, please state “None.”

¹ The online survey utilized a drop-down menu function, with options being given from the twelve counseling issues identified in part 1 of the survey. In addition to the twelve options, an “other” option was provided, with an opportunity given to fill in a blank.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the counseling needs of the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church.¹ For the purposes of this project, “middle-aged” is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Standard Questions:

1. Among the following list, what would you think are the top 3 most pressing issues being faced by the middle-aged population at Kindred?
 - Transitioning to the “empty nest”
 - Dealing with chronic illness and/or chronic pain
 - How to relate to adult children
 - Living with prolonged infertility
 - Processing grief after you’ve lost a loved one
 - Understanding marriage dynamics after 25 years
 - Singleness as a middle-aged believer in the church
 - Caring for aging parents and/or chronically ill loved ones
 - Experiencing “midlife crisis”
 - Transitioning to life as a widow in the church
 - Relating to adult children who have come back to live at home
 - Financial issues during the middle-age years

¹ A sub-set of the middle-aged membership of Kindred Community Church was interviewed personally to gain a clearer understanding of the struggles among this cohort. Interviews were limited to a thirty-minute timeframe. Audios of the interviews followed a semi-structured format and audio recordings were made. Detailed written notes of the audio recordings were made within a week after the interview took place. After the project is completed and defended before the appropriate committee, the audio recordings will be deleted.

2. Are there any urgent issues that are not on this list?

3. Among the issues on this list, are there any that you have personally dealt with? Can you tell me about your personal experience with this issue?

Probing Questions:

- What was your greatest encouragement when you were dealing with this issue?

- What was your greatest difficulty when you were dealing with this issue?

- From your perspective, how can the church be more equipped to minister to people who are struggling with this issue?

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and practical usefulness of a curriculum designed to equip biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church. For the purposes of this project, “middle-aged” is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this evaluation, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ **Date:** _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lessons are faithful to the Scriptures and the meaning of the Bible is rightly represented.					
The curriculum is directly applicable to the spiritual needs of the local church.					
The lessons are well organized and the points are clear.					
The truths of Scripture are presented with compassion and pastoral care.					
The lessons make specific practical application to real life situations.					
The curriculum uses illustrations from real life which serve to reinforce the course material.					
The curriculum fulfills its purpose in equipping believers to counsel others.					
The sequence of topics in the curriculum follow a logical flow.					

APPENDIX 4
CURRICULUM REVIEW RESULTS

Table A1. Results from expert panel’s review of curriculum

	1	2	3	4
The lessons are faithful to the Scriptures and the meaning of the Bible is rightly represented.	0	0	1	3
The curriculum is directly applicable to the spiritual needs of the local church.	0	0	1	3
The lessons are well organized and the points are clear.	0	0	0	4
The truths of Scripture are presented with compassion and pastoral care.	0	0	0	4
The lessons make specific practical application to real life situations.	0	0	0	4
The curriculum uses illustrations from real life which serve to reinforce the course material.	0	0	0	4
The curriculum fulfills its purpose in equipping believers to counsel others.	0	0	1	3
The sequence of topics in the curriculum follow a logical flow.	0	0	1	3

Mean Score: 3.875

The scoring options on the rubric were: 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

APPENDIX 5

COUNSELING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is a Counseling Skills Assessment. It contains a thirty-question survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to determine the knowledge and skill level of the class participant in counseling on topics specific to middle-aged believers. The assessment was distributed electronically and the results were recorded and analyzed. This skills assessment was administered in person at the beginning of the twelve-week course instruction and again immediately after the instruction has been completed.

COUNSELING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Name: _____ Date: _____

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the biblical counselor's knowledge and competence in addressing issues specific to middle-aged believers. For the purposes of this project, "middle-aged" is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this assessment, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Please circle the appropriate answer. These questions will ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

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

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | I have a specific counseling plan in place to minister to those who are grieving over the loss of a loved one. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | I can identify verses from the Bible that could be used to encourage someone dealing with chronic pain. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I am able to ask intelligent questions of someone who is discouraged in their relationship with adult children. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | I have a working knowledge of the biblical categories of singleness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I can explain in biblical terms the factors that would lead a person to experience "midlife crisis." | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

6.	I have a working knowledge of the Psalms of Lament.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7.	I can identify the reasons why grandparents would struggle in their relationship with children and grandchildren.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	I am able to name specific ways that a widow's life changes in the first six months after losing a spouse.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	I know how to have a knowledgeable conversation with someone who is considering placing their parents in a nursing home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	I understand the specific temptations that caregivers face when ministering to those who are chronically ill.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	I can name reasons why single believers in the church may struggle in their fellowship in the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I am equipped to biblically encourage a divorced believer in the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I know how to identify the theme of regret in a believer's life and give a biblical response.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I am able to biblically counsel a single person who is struggling with loneliness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	I can explain the unique pressures a couple faces after being married for 25 years.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I understand the differences between how a secular psychologist and a biblical counselor would help a grieving person.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I understand why a person struggling with chronic pain would be reluctant to come for biblical counseling.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I am able to name examples of financial decisions a widow has to make after losing a spouse.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

19.	I am able to address some of the unbiblical thoughts that single people have about life and marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	I am equipped to help a widow who is struggling with unresolved bitterness from her past marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	I know how to biblically encourage a single parent in the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	I am able to use the promises of God in Scripture to encourage a believer who is caring for an aging parent.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	I can offer biblical hope to someone with unbelieving adult children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	I have a practical counseling plan in place to help those struggling with “midlife crisis.”	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	I have a working knowledge of the types of financial and medical decisions made by those caring for aging parents.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26.	I have an understanding of the specific pressures faced by a married couple experiencing the “empty nest.”	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27.	I know how to express compassion for a widow who has lost a spouse in the last six months.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28.	I am able to identify passages from the Bible which address not only the joys but also the sorrows of the parenting task.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29.	I can instruct a parent in the relational skills necessary to build up their relationship with adult children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30.	I know the difference between giving false hope and biblical hope to someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 6
COUNSELING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Table A2. Pre- and post-counseling assessment results

Student	Pre-test Total	Post-test Total
1	93	144
2	98	150
3	125	171
4	102	177
5	134	168
6	116	146
7	118	167
8	34	164
9	63	159
10	117	158
11	117	180
12	131	172
Mean Total Score	104	163
Mean Score per Question	3.47	5.43

APPENDIX 7

CLASS SCHEDULE FOR “COUNSELING MIDDLE-AGED BELIEVERS IN CHRIST”

Table A3. Class schedule for August 7-9, 2020

Friday, August 7th	
6:00-7:00 p.m.	Biblically Evaluating “Midlife Crisis”
7:15-8:15 p.m.	Processing Grief After You’ve Lost a Loved One
8:30-9:30 p.m.	Understanding Marriage Dynamics After Twenty-Five Years
Saturday, August 8th	
8:30-9:30 a.m.	Zoom Session – Role Play Counseling
9:45-10:45 a.m.	Zoom Session – Role Play Counseling
11:00am-noon	Parenting Adult Children
Noon-1:00 p.m.	Lunch Break
1:00-2:00 p.m.	Singleness as a Middle-Aged Believer in the Church
2:15-3:15 p.m.	Transitioning to Life as a Widow in the Church
3:30-4:30 p.m.	Dealing with Chronic Illness and/or Chronic Pain
Sunday, August 9th	
1:00-2:00 p.m.	Caring for Aging Parents
2:15-3:15 p.m.	Zoom Session – Role Play Counseling
3:30-4:30 p.m.	Zoom Session – Role Play Counseling

APPENDIX 8
THE THREE-TREE DIAGRAM

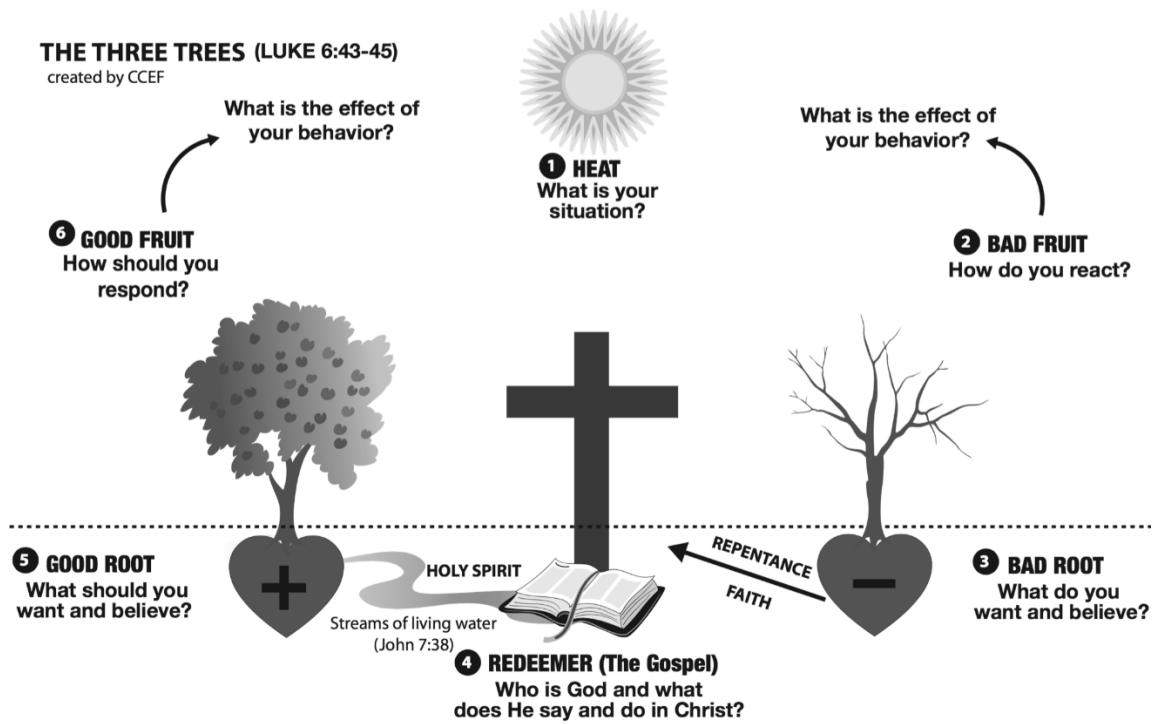


Figure A1. Three tree diagram

APPENDIX 9
COUNSELING SCENARIOS FOR
ROLE PLAY SESSIONS

The case studies were adapted from examples that had been observed in the research materials used in the preparation of the curriculum.

Table A4. Counseling scenarios used in role play sessions

No.	Counselee	Scenario
1	“Sally”	A single Christian in her 40s who is experiencing a midlife crisis ¹
2	“Susie”	An aging woman who is struggling with the loss of physical beauty ²
3	“Mary”	A mother of three children who is feeling insignificant as her children grow independent ³
4	“Ruth”	A wife who is struggling to connect with her husband as she faces the empty-nesting years ⁴
5	“Wendy”	A widow who has recently lost her husband Peter after being married thirty years ⁵
6	“Jenny”	A mother whose adult son has recently divorced and moved back into the home ⁶
7	“John”	A father whose adult son has notified him that he is no longer a Christian ⁷

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004), 46-49.

² Jim Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1978), 180.

³ Conway, *Men in Midlife Crisis*, 178.

⁴ David Arp and Claudia Arp, *The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of the Empty-Nest Years* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 88.

⁵ A fictional case study based off of a composite of real-life scenarios.

⁶ Gary Chapman and Harold Myra, *Married and Still Loving It: The Joys and Challenges of the Second Half* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 48-49.

⁷ Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 7-14.

Table A4 continued

8	“Clark”	A single man in his forties who is struggling with loneliness ⁸
9	“Tina”	A caregiver to her husband George who has been partially paralyzed due to suffering from a stroke ⁹
10	“Rosemary”	A woman recently diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and is struggling with pain ¹⁰
11	“Bobby”	A father who is upset because his unemployed adult son Phil is living at home ¹¹
12	“Mary”	A caregiver to her 85-year old mother who is experiencing marital strain with her husband Mike ¹²

⁸ Jeff Forrey, “Counsel for Concerned Singles,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 24.

⁹ Michael Emlet, *Help for the Caregiver: Facing the Challenges with Understanding and Strength* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008), 3-4.

¹⁰ Mary J. Yerkes, “Beauty Instead of Ashes: Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 33-34.

¹¹ Ross Campbell and Gary Chapman, *How to Really Love Your Adult Child: Building a Healthy Relationship in a Changing World* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2011), 25-26.

¹² Howard A. Eyrich and Judy Babler, *Art of Aging: Preparing and Caring: Preparing for Retirement and Caring for Parents* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2006), 78-79.

APPENDIX 10

COUNSELOR EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the counseling skills of those who are being trained to counsel middle-aged believers at Kindred Community Church. For the purposes of this project, “middle-aged” is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this assessment, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

COUNSELOR EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ **Date:** _____

Counselor Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The counselor prays with the counselee.					
The counselor asks purposeful questions for the purpose of data-gathering.					
The counselor displays both verbal and non-verbal communication skills.					
The counselor demonstrates Christ-like empathy and compassion.					
The counselor utilizes Scripture to address the counselee's problem.					
The counselor faithfully represents the meaning of the text of Scripture.					
The counselor makes specific application of the Word of God.					
The counselor gives the counselee hope.					

APPENDIX 11

COUNSELING EVALUATION RESULTS

Table A5. Results from evaluation of counseling skills—all 12 students

	1	2	3	4
The counselor prays with the counselee.	0	0	0	12
The counselor asks purposeful questions for the purpose of data-gathering.	0	0	3	12
The counselor displays both verbal and non-verbal communication skills.	0	0	5	7
The counselor demonstrates Christ-like empathy and compassion.	0	0	5	7
The counselor utilizes Scripture to address the counselee's problem.	0	0	3	9
The counselor faithfully represents the meaning of the text of Scripture.	0	0	3	9
The counselor makes specific application of the Word of God.	0	0	3	9
The counselor gives the counselee hope.	0	0	5	7

Mean Score: 3.84

Table A6. Results from Evaluation of Counseling Skills—7 students with experience in formal counseling (ACBC Certified Biblical Counselors and students enrolled in ACBC Phase 3 Training)

	1	2	3	4
The counselor prays with the counselee.	0	0	0	7
The counselor asks purposeful questions for the purpose of data-gathering.	0	0	0	7
The counselor displays both verbal and non-verbal communication skills.	0	0	1	6
The counselor demonstrates Christ-like empathy and compassion.	0	0	1	6
The counselor utilizes Scripture to address the counselee's problem.	0	0	0	7
The counselor faithfully represents the meaning of the text of Scripture.	0	0	0	7
The counselor makes specific application of the Word of God.	0	0	0	7
The counselor gives the counselee hope.	0	0	1	6

Mean Score: 3.95

The scoring options on the rubric were: 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

APPENDIX 12

MOBILIZATION PLAN TEMPLATE

Mobilization Plan
Counseling Middle-Aged Believers in Christ
Counseling Seminar - August 7-9, 2020

Class Participant: _____

Amount of Biblical Counseling Training Received (check one):

- I am an ACBC Certified Biblical Counselor
- I have passed Phase 2 of ACBC Training (Theological and Counseling Exams)
- I have taken Phase 1 of ACBC Training – 30-hour Basic Training Course

Applications to Counseling Ministry (Formal/Informal):

Lesson/Principle I Will Apply	Ministry Setting	How Application will be Made
1.		
2.		
3.		

Applications to Other Ministries: (e.g. Small Groups, Welcome Team, Discipleship, etc.)

Lesson/Principle I Will Apply	Ministry Setting	How Application will be Made
1.		
2.		

Materials I will Recommend to Others (Books/Booklets/Journal Articles/Sermons):

Resource	Type of Resource (Book/Booklet/Sermon)	Ministry Setting
1.		
2.		
3.		

APPENDIX 13

MOBILIZATION PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the mobilization plans created by class participants who have been trained to counsel middle-aged believers at Kindred Community Church. For the purposes of this project, “middle-aged” is defined as being over 44 years of age and less than 66 years old. This research is being conducted by Daniel Nah for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this assessment, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

MOBILIZATION PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ **Date:** _____

Mobilization Plan Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The plan addresses the specific spiritual needs of Kindred Community Church.					
The plan takes into account both formal and informal opportunities for counseling ministry.					
The plan integrates with other ministries of the church.					
The plan takes into account the individual's specific gifting and maturity level.					
The plan lays out specific steps of practical application.					
The plan accounts for different responses to the counseling ministry.					
The plan prepares the participant with specific resources.					
The plan is realistic and not overly burdensome.					

APPENDIX 14

MOBILIZATION PLAN EVALUATION RESULTS

Table A7. Results from mobilization plan evaluations

	1	2	3	4
The plan addresses the specific spiritual needs of Kindred Community Church.	0	0	1	35
The plan takes into account both formal and informal opportunities for counseling ministry.	0	0	1	35
The plan integrates with other ministries of the church.	0	0	1	35
The plan takes into account the individual's specific gifting and maturity level.	0	0	3	33
The plan lays out specific steps of practical application.	0	0	8	28
The plan accounts for different responses to the counseling ministry.	0	0	4	32
The plan prepares the participant with specific resources.	0	0	2	34
The plan is realistic and not overly burdensome.	0	0	0	36

Mean Score: 3.93

A total of 36 evaluations were received. 12 students turned in mobilization plans and each plan was reviewed by three members of the expert panel.

The scoring options on the rubric were: 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; and 4 = exemplary.

APPENDIX 15
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A8. *T*-test: Paired two sample for means

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	104	163
Variance	862.7272727	139.2727273
Observations	12	12
Pearson Correlation	0.241806757	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	11	
t Stat	-7.075627327	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0000102852	
t Critical one-tail	1.7958848187	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0000205704	
t Critical two-tail	2.2009851601	

APPENDIX 16

SUGGESTED READING ASSIGNMENTS FOR “COUNSELING MIDDLE-AGED BELIEVERS IN CHRIST”

Pre-Course Reading (2 Books Total):

Fitzpatrick, Elyse. *The Afternoon of Life: Finding Purpose and Joy in Midlife*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004.

Tripp, Paul David. *Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004.

Post-Course Reading (3 Books Total):

Choose One (Christian Integrationist):

Arp, David, and Claudia Arp. *The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of the Empty-Nest Years*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Campbell, Ross, and Gary Chapman. *How to Really Love Your Adult Child: Building a Healthy Relationship in a Changing World*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2011.

Chapman, Gary, and Harold Myra. *Married and Still Loving It: The Joys and Challenges of the Second Half*. Chicago: Moody, 2016.

Choose Two (Biblical Counseling):

Danylak, Barry. *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

Eyrich, Howard A. *Art of Aging: A Christian Handbook*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2006.

Fitzpatrick, Elyse, and Jim Newheiser with Laura Hendrickson. *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005.

Neff, Miriam. *From One Widow to Another: Conversations on the New You*. Chicago: Moody, 2009.

Tautges, Paul. *Comfort the Grieving: Ministering God's Grace in Times of Loss*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING BIBLICAL COUNSELORS TO ADDRESS MID-LIFE ISSUES AT KINDRED COMMUNITY CHURCH IN ANAHEIM HILLS, CALIFORNIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
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This project is designed to train biblical counselors at Kindred Community Church in Anaheim Hills, California to address issues specific to middle-aged believers. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context of Kindred Community Church and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of five passages of Scripture (Psalm 19:7-9; Proverbs 1:1-7; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Peter 1:3-4) to demonstrate that the Scriptures are sufficient to address the life issues of a middle-aged believer in Christ. Chapter 3 surveys the literature from both the fields of secular psychology and Christian counseling and demonstrates that there are specific issues which are observed to be common among those in the middle-aged population. Chapter 4 describes the content of the course curriculum and the practical plan for its implementation in the church. Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the ministry project based upon the specific goals which have already been articulated. This project aims to equip the counselor to minister compassionately and biblically to the middle-aged population at Kindred Community Church, thereby fulfilling the church's mission statement "to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ."

VITA

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EDUCATION

BA, University of California Los Angeles, 1995
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ORGANIZATIONS

Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Valley Korean Community Church, Sylmar, California, 1995-1997
English Ministry Pastor, Valley Korean Community Church, Sylmar, California, 1997-2001
Teaching Pastor, Hope Bible Church, Glendale, California, 2002-2006
Executive/Associate Pastor, Cornerstone Bible Church, Garden Grove, California, 2007-2013
Pastor of Care and Connections, Kindred Community Church, Anaheim, California, 2015-2020
Pastor of Counseling, Kindred Community Church, Anaheim, California, 2020-