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INCREASING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BIBLICAL COUNSELING
TO SUPPORT A GOSPEL CITY MOVEMENT IN
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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May 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

INCREASING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BIBLICAL COUNSELING
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To my wife and best friend, Megan. Thank you for
being the visionary influence behind this project
and a constant inspiration to me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBC	Journal of Biblical Counseling
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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PREFACE

I am indebted to numerous people and organizations for the opportunity to complete this project. First and foremost, I thank my heavenly Father for his constant provision and kindness. I am astonished by the depth of his love both for me as his son and for the church as his bride. I am exceedingly grateful for this time that he has allowed me to study under the wonderful faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

There have been three church congregations who have been exceedingly important, supportive, and influential to me. I first met Jesus at First Baptist Church – Cleveland, MS, and the congregation there has invested greatly into my soul, my education, and my ministry. I am eternally grateful. I cut my teeth in ministry at Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY. Sojourn’s impact on my theological vision and philosophy of ministry will always be present with me. Lastly, I have served the past nine years as a pastor at City on a Hill Church (first in Brookline, then in Somerville). You are my family and my friends. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve you as a pastor and to complete this program while I pastor you.

I need to particularly thank the men and women who have most influenced my understanding of the care and cure of souls. Dr. Robert K. and Karen Cheong at Sojourn Church introduced us to biblical counseling and have served as loving mentors over the years. I want to especially thank Dr. Cheong for serving as my faculty supervisor and for his patience and help in reading and reviewing my chapters. Alasdair and Lauren Groves at CCEF have also been excellent mentors and dear friends who have shaped our ministry as much if not more than anyone.

Lastly, I must thank my wife and children, who have sacrificed their own “dad time” to allow me the opportunity to study. Megan, thank you for your influential

thoughts and sacrificial love. Kennedy, thank you for positive spirit and ferocious hugs. Shepherd, thank you for always bringing a smile to my face, no matter what deadlines are before me. Rowan, thank you for coming a week early so that you can also be included in this preface!

Fletcher Lang

Somerville, Massachusetts

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As unlikely as it may seem, a strong movement of the gospel is happening in Boston, Massachusetts. Boston is far from the “Bible Belt,” and even farther from its Christian roots. The city was founded in 1630, and as the original English settlers landed, Governor Winthrop gave a sermon declaring that Boston will serve as a “city upon a hill.” Winthrop and his fellow puritans founded this “city upon a hill” to serve as a model of Christian charity to those back in England.¹ Over the years, this vision for the city of Boston has disintegrated. The city of Boston has now fallen deeply into post-Christian secularism. Rugged individualism and self-reliance now reign where the gospel once thrived. Boston is recognized as the third least “Bible-minded” city in the country.² Nevertheless, a powerful movement of God is happening in this city.

Context

Until recently, Boston has been known as a church planting graveyard, but in the past fifteen years dozens of gospel-centered churches have been planted and are thriving. While God is obviously at work in Boston, this church-planting movement is in its early-development phase. Unlike other cities where gospel-centered churches have thrived for years, there are very few specialized ministries in the Boston area to help support what is happening in our churches.

¹ Larry Witham, *A City Upon a Hill: How Sermons Changed the Course of American History* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 18.

² “The Most Bible-Minded Cities in America,” American Bible Society, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.americanbible.org/features/americas-most-bible-minded-cities>.

Boston desperately needs to be transformed by the gospel, but as Timothy Keller asserts, “changing a city with the gospel takes a movement.”³ Keller goes on to declare that a gospel movement can best be facilitated by creating a “gospel ecosystem.” This gospel ecosystem includes many different factors, but one thing that is glaringly missing from Boston gospel ecosystem are robust specialized ministries.⁴ Support for family life in the city is particularly needed in our city. In particular, schools and counseling services are needed to support family life in the city. These sorts of institutions “help people stay and raise their children in the city.”⁵

My experience with ministry in Boston displays a huge need to convince people to stay in the city and to love the city. Boston is an exceedingly transient city, and people move away from the city regularly. At City on a Hill churches, we typically have around 25% of our congregations leave the city each year. On a personal level, my wife and I have seen many of our closest friends leave the city during our time in Boston. Doing ministry in the city is difficult for a variety of reasons; doing ministry in the city while many of your closest friends and co-laborers move away is nearly impossible.

Not only is the city transient, but the city is filled with pressures. Boston is an exceedingly busy and highly competitive city. Two of the world’s most prestigious and challenging universities sit just north of the Charles River in Cambridge, MA. MIT and Harvard University are magnets for over-achievers from around the globe. Boston is also one of the most expensive cities in the nation. It regularly ranks as the third most expensive city in the United States after only New York and San Francisco. This is a city

³ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 371.

⁴ Other factors that Keller says contribute to the gospel ecosystem are a contextualized theological vision, a church planting and renewing movement, and six other specialized ministries: evangelistic ministries, justice and mercy ministries, faith and work initiatives, theological/ministry training, unity of Christian leaders, and a prayer movement. See figure 1 on page 8. *Ibid.*, 375.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

full of people feeling overwhelmed by all the pressures that they experience and without anywhere to run. But even if people did seek out Christ-centered counseling for the issues, there would be nowhere to go.

Currently, there are very few counselors in Boston who would describe themselves as “biblical counselors.” The nearest seminary in our area is Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary; and while that institution does a good job providing evangelical theological and ministry training in our area, its counseling program is solidly in the integrationist camp. As a result, there are many counselors who would hold to an integrationist position throughout the city. These counselors tend to be at best ignorant of biblical counseling, and at worst hostile toward biblical counseling. In addition, there are many Christians in our city who have been trained in secular psychotherapy, but who are exceedingly interested in learning how their faith can potentially fuel their counseling. As I have talked with other pastors in Boston over the past six years, many of us recognize the need for biblical counseling in our city and have prayed for a gospel-centered, church-based, clinically-informed center in Boston.

Rationale

The gospel movement in our city is in dire need of a movement of biblical counseling. Life in Boston is hard. Many of our pastors and church planters are spiritually exhausted and have no gospel-centered counselors to talk with personally. This has resulted in many pastors giving up and moving away after a few short years of ministry in the city. If the pastors cannot even take care of themselves, it is not hard to imagine how poorly the members of our local churches are doing. Many people in Boston often work over 70 hours a week and simply do not take care of themselves physically or spiritually. Church members in the city are struggling without the appropriate resources to apply the gospel to their everyday lives.

For this reason, Boston would benefit greatly from Christians increasing in

knowledge about biblical counseling. *Biblical* counseling is needed because other models of counseling fail to understand the most basic problem that humans face: sin. Only in a biblical counseling model is the primary emphasis on worship and turning from idolatry.⁶ Biblical counseling can certainly incorporate insights from psychology but only with caution. Among the different models of Christian counseling, biblical counseling stands alone in the proper understanding of the problem with man and the cure of souls. This is why my wife and I, along with a coalition of pastors and area leaders, have started a biblical counseling center called the “Boston Center for Biblical Counseling.”

I deeply believe that our city does not just need a few professional biblical counselors, but rather we need a movement of biblical counseling in churches all throughout the area. Ephesians 4 encourages pastors to “equip the saints for the work of ministry,”⁷ and this ministry is described as “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”⁸ Our counseling center desires to come alongside local pastors and church members to better equip them for the care of souls because the “primary and fullest expression of counseling ministry occurs in local church communities where pastors effectively shepherd souls while equipping and overseeing diverse forms of every-member ministry.”⁹ Ed Welch says that “all God’s people are counselors,” meaning that every Christian is called to apply the Word of God to life.¹⁰

While church-based, pastoral-led, every-member ministry is the ultimate goal,

⁶ Tim Keller offers an insightful and helpful overview of the models of Christian counseling in his article, “Four Models of Counseling in Pastoral Ministry.” Accessed June 19, 2018, <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/four-models-of-counseling-in-pastoral-ministry/>.

⁷ 4:12.

⁸ Eph 4:15.

⁹ David Powlison, *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Winston-Salem: Punch Press, 2005), 174.

¹⁰ Ed Welch, “What Is Biblical Counseling, Anyway?” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1997), 4.

the reality is that many pastors in our area are largely ignorant of biblical counseling foundations and methodology. Most pastors in a Boston have to do a little bit of everything, which means they are not specialists in any one thing. In this way our pastors are like swiss-army knives – they do a lot of things, but no one thing perfectly. Most churches in Boston are small and under-resourced. The majority of churches in our area only have one or two pastors serving on staff, sometimes bi-vocationally. Because these churches are small, the pastors usually feel as though they do not have enough time for anything, especially complicated pastoral care issues. By and large, our churches have not developed any sort of counseling ministry whatsoever. When pastors are challenged with a complicated pastoral care cases, they simply do not know what to do or where to turn.

The primary goal of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling is to come alongside our area pastors and congregants to equip them to counsel one another biblically. While our counseling center offers counseling services, our hope is that these professional services will simply act as a complement to our equipping goals. As we build this gospel ecosystem in our city, our prayer is that a powerful movement of God will push Boston to what Keller calls a “tipping point.” Keller defines a citywide tipping point as “when the number of gospel-shaped Christians in a city becomes so large that Christian influence on the civic and social life of the city – and on the very culture – is largely recognizable and acknowledged.”¹¹ This is our hope and prayer for our city, that God will begin a gospel movement that influences every aspect of Boston.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to support the gospel city movement of Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among

¹¹Timothy Keller, *Center Church*, 376.

Christians in the area.

Goals

The following three goals guided this project:

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of biblical counseling among pastors and congregants in our area.
2. The second goal was to develop seminar curriculum that increases knowledge of biblical counseling practices and beliefs.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of local pastors and congregants in biblical counseling by using seminar curriculum.

The successful completion of each goal was dependent upon a defined means of measurement and benchmark of success. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project.¹² My first goal was to assess the current understanding of biblical counseling among church leaders and congregants in our area. This goal was measured by administering a Biblical Counseling Perceptions Survey (BCPS) to area church leaders and congregants.¹³ This goal was considered successfully met when 119 church leaders and congregants in the Boston area completed the BCPS and the survey was analyzed yielding a picture of the current knowledge levels of biblical counseling.

My second goal was to develop curriculum for a seminar that informed area church leaders and congregants about biblical counseling foundations and methodology. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical

¹² All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

¹³ See appendix 1.

faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of curriculum.¹⁴ This goal was considered successfully met with a minimum of 90% of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. The material was revised until the 90% benchmark was met.

My third goal was to increase knowledge of biblical counseling foundations and methodology through teaching the developed curriculum in a seminar. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey to seminar participants, which was used to measure the change in knowledge.¹⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following three terms are used often in this project and require nuanced definition:

Biblical counseling. David Powlison defines the biblical counseling model using the acronym “COMPIN”:

COMPIN believes that the Christian faith contains *COMPrehensive INternal resources* to enable us to construct a Christian model of personality, change, and counseling. While the modern psychologies will stimulate and inform, they do not play a constitutive role in building a robust model. The operating premise of COMPIN is that the Faith’s psychology offers a take on the human condition essentially different from any of the other contemporary psychologies. The living Christ working in His people through His Word is the engine producing depth of insight, accurate theory, and effective practice. The counseling that Christians do must orient to and take its cues from our own source.¹⁶

Gospel city movement. This is a term coined by Timothy Keller in his book *Center Church*. He describes it as “a citywide movement of churches and ministries that

¹⁴ See appendix 2.

¹⁵ See appendix 1.

¹⁶ David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 11.

exit in a supportive, mutually stimulating relationship.”¹⁷ The following figure demonstrates the three concentric rings that make up the ecosystem for a gospel city movement.

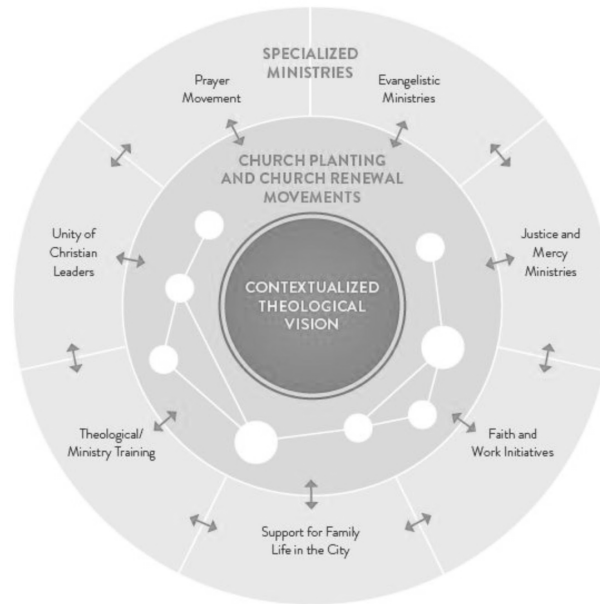


Figure 1. A gospel ecosystem for a city¹⁸

Keller argues that a gospel city movement occurs when:

The whole body of Christ grows faster than the population so that the percentage of Christians in the city rises. We call this a *movement* because it consists of an energy that extends across multiple denominations and networks. It does not reside in a single church or set of leaders or in any particular command center, and its forward motion does not depend on any one organization. It is organic and self-propagating, the result of a set of forces that interact, support, sustain, and stimulate one another. We can also call it a *gospel ecosystem*.¹⁹

Integrationist counseling. Powlison also defines the integrationist counseling model in the same article referenced above using the term “VITEX”:

¹⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 368.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

VITEX believes that secular psychologies must make a *VITal EXternal contribution* in the construction of a Christian model of personality, change, and counseling. While biblical faith gives us certain controls to evaluate outside input, it does not give enough detail to enable us to constitute and develop a model. The operating premise of VITEX, whether explicit or implicit, is that Christian truths must be ‘integrated’ with the observation, personality theories, psychotherapies, and professional roles of the mental health world. Modern psychologies are the engine procuring insights, theories, and practices. In an essential way, the counseling that Christians do will orient to and take its cues from outside resources.²⁰

The delimitation of this project is that it was conducted within fifteen weeks, including pre-assessment, curriculum development, curriculum instruction, and post-assessment. While knowledge of biblical counseling foundations and methodology were increased within this timeframe, actually equipping participants to counseling biblically would take much more time investment.

Conclusion

Christians in Boston, Massachusetts, need to learn what it means to counsel one another biblically in order to support the gospel city movement in our city. Christian counselors and church leaders who understand the biblical and theological foundations of biblical counseling are essential in order to support sustaining family life in an urban, post-Christian city such as Boston. The following chapters will biblically and methodologically defend what sort of biblical counseling culture can best support a gospel city movement.

²⁰ David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” 11.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The overall purpose of this project was to increase knowledge about biblical counseling in Boston, MA, to support a gospel city movement. The purpose of this chapter is to establish the biblical and theological foundations for what is known as biblical counseling. The thesis for this chapter is that biblical counseling is a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another's unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In order to support this thesis, four passages are examined in this chapter. The passages begin by looking at how God cares for his people and move gradually into more practical applications for how his people are to care for one another. First, a careful examination of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 displays how the comfort of God is given to individuals so that they may help others who are suffering. Second, a study of Galatians 6:2 shows that God's people must bear one another's burdens in order to fulfill the law of Christ. Third, a careful inspection of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 shows that different people need different approaches depending upon their personal needs. Finally, by means of an exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-12, the primary context of biblical counseling is established to be within the church.

The Comfort of God Is Given to Individuals so that They May Help Others Who Are Suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

The first passage to be examined is 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. This passage is a particularly excellent starting point for an in-depth study of the biblical foundations for biblical counseling because it grounds the ministry of counseling to the source of all

comfort, God himself. One of the primary goals of biblical counseling is to help hurting and afflicted believers to experience the comfort of God. Biblical counseling must start with God and always strive to offer the comfort that he affords. Before any believer is called to care for another believer, they must first personally receive comfort from God.

Throughout all of the Scriptures, the indicatives of the gospel precede the imperatives. As Gordon Fee states, “To be sure, the indicative must precede the imperative, or all is lost...”¹ While there are many commands in Scripture for Christians to care for one another, this passage establishes the grounds for such care because all believers have first been cared for by God. This comfort from God is the gospel indicative that precedes the gospel imperative to comfort one another.

This passage found at the beginning of 2 Corinthians starts an odd introduction compared to most of Paul’s other letters. 2 Corinthians does not start with the customary thanksgiving form of a Hellenistic greeting.² Rather, 2 Corinthians begins with a blessing from a Jewish liturgical tradition.³ Not only does Paul begin with a blessing instead of a thanksgiving in 2 Corinthians, the subject of his introduction is different than what is typical for Paul. In his introductions, Paul normally focuses on “the grace of God evident in the lives of the readers,” but in 2 Corinthians, Paul focuses on how God has comforted him and his coworkers in the gospel in the midst of affliction.⁴ Commentators are divided on the reasoning for Paul’s change in his typical introductory patterns, but Barnett offers the most satisfying explanation for the change by asserting, “Paul’s ‘blessing’ of God at the beginning of the letter should be seen as expressing his heartfelt worship of God for

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 227.

² Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 65.

³ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 116.

⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: IVP, 1987), 59.

recent mercies to him that he will expand upon in the letter.”⁵

The content of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 can be broken into two parts. First, this passage describes how God is the source of all comfort as he is the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” Second, this passage teaches the people of God, who have received the comfort of the Father, to comfort one another just as God has comforted us.

God Comforts His People

As previously noted, this passage begins with a traditional Jewish liturgical blessing: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” While this blessing may have been familiar to the original Jewish readers, Garland observes that this blessing would have also been rather jarring to the original readers for at least two reasons. First, God is recognized as the Father of Jesus Christ and not just the Father of Israel. Second, the blessing establishes Jesus as the most supreme blessing to humankind.⁶ This verse helps Christians to remember that the privilege of calling God their “Father” is only available to them through their union with Christ through Father. As Hughes points out, “God only has one Son; the many sons are sons in Him.”⁷ Christians only receive the benefits of sonship through their union with Christ.

Not only is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but Paul also describes him as the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” This phrasing again borrows from Jewish literary tradition. The description of God as the “Father of mercies” was regularly stressed throughout the LLX and in other Jewish literature contemporary with Paul.⁸

⁵ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 66.

⁶ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 58.

⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 11.

⁸ For a more full description of the different citations throughout Jewish literature, see Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 109.

With the description of God as the “God of all comfort,” Paul introduces the primary theme in this section of the epistle.

The Greek word translated as “comfort” in most English Bibles is *παράκλησις*. Different forms of this word group appear repeatedly throughout the book of 2 Corinthians as one of the primary themes of the letter. While the New Testament includes fifty-nine total instances of the word grouping, 2 Corinthians itself includes twenty-nine of those occurrences.⁹ Solely within the first five verses of 2 Corinthians, different forms of the word appear ten times. Furnish emphasizes that *παράκλησις* “must not be confused with the more subjective notions of sympathy or pity... rather, to ‘comfort’ in the strict sense, [meaning] ‘to strengthen much’ or to encourage.”¹⁰ Barnett makes a similar observation stating that “encouragement” or “consolation” may better serve the meaning of *παράκλησις* in this context than “comfort.”¹¹

This understanding of the word “comfort” is far different than what most English speakers think when they first read the word. The usual connotation that comes with the word “comfort” is closer to what modern readers understand as “soothing,” but the word in this context actually means “to help withstand.” As Garland eloquently puts it, “[Comfort] is not some tranquilizing dose of grace that only dulls pains but a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind, and soul.”¹²

The passage continues by stating that this God of all comfort “comforts us in all our affliction.” Here the reader learns that God is the source of all comfort for the believer. Comfort for Christians begins with the comfort that they receive from God. In this way, Paul is foreshadowing the messianic age where Jesus will wipe away every tear

⁹ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 60.

¹⁰ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 109.

¹¹ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 69.

¹² Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 60.

from every eye (Revelation 21:4). Because the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Christ, believers today receive a foretaste of the full and future comfort of God that is to come at the second coming.¹³

Since the word “comfort” in this context means to “strengthen” or “encourage,” what is the nature of the comfort that God gives to his people in the midst of their afflictions? Certainly, there are times when God may remove the affliction altogether, but this is not the normative pattern found throughout the Scriptures. Suffering and afflictions are a regular part of the Christian life. Paul himself was no stranger to persistent affliction with no relief (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The comfort that believers receive from God can definitely come in the form of a deliverance from affliction, but more often this comfort comes as a deliverance *in* affliction. God’s comfort encourages his children to remain steadfast in the midst of suffering. The people of God always have available comfort from God in equal or greater proportion to the affliction they receive.

God’s People Comfort One Another

Biblical counseling is a helping relationship where a person’s unique struggles are connected to the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Essential in this understanding of biblical counseling is the source of all comfort, God himself. After Paul establishes God as the source of all comfort for his people, he then instructs the Corinthian Christians to comfort one another with the same comfort that they have personally received from God our Father. In fact, this serves as the purpose clause for God’s people having received God’s comfort in the first place.¹⁴ God gives his comfort to his people in order for his people to comfort one another.

God uses many different means to provide grace into afflictions, but one of his

¹³ Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 60.

¹⁴ Furnish notes that this is evident by the Greek syntax present, “εις with the articular infinitive.” Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 110.

primary methods of giving comfort to those who are hurting is through his people. Paul explains this principle just a few verses later when he states in verse 6, “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort...” This passage reminds the church that they are not to suffer alone, but that they are to share God’s comfort with one another. Comforting one another with the comfort of God is one of the highest goals of biblical counseling.

Paul uses the same word for comfort as before, “*παράκλησις*.” Robert Kelleman notes that this is the predominate word in the New Testament for spiritual care among believers.¹⁵ This is a stark contrast to the preconceptions of many people about the biblical counseling movement. The biblical counseling movement is known by many as primarily a “truth-telling” movement and not a “comfort-giving” movement. This is largely due to the early influence of Jay Adams and what became known as the “nouthetic” method of counseling.¹⁶ The word “nouthetic” is a modified transliteration of the Greek term “*νουθετέω*” from Romans 15:14 meaning “to instruct.”¹⁷ Adams and others have regularly over-emphasized the confrontation aspect to biblical counseling as opposed to the comfort-giving aspect of biblical counseling. Both nouthetic and comfort-giving (*παράκλησις*) counseling are necessary for appropriate care of souls in the local church, and a balance must be held by competent biblical counselors. Kelleman actually calls for a new term to be used to describe biblical counseling that combines the two words, “parathetic.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Robert W. Kelleman, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ*, Equipping Biblical Counselors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 129.

¹⁶ Jay Adams is the founder of the biblical counseling movement and remains one of most influential voices in the movement. He introduces the term “nouthetic counseling” in his groundbreaking work, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

¹⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 266.

¹⁸ Kelleman, *Gospel Conversations*, 130.

This exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 has demonstrated that biblical counseling begins with God. God is the source of all comfort and encouragement, and those who have received his comfort are called to comfort one another. The Bible does not merely describe God as the source of all comfort, but it also commands the believers to bear the burdens of one another so that they can fulfill the law of Christ. This will be displayed through an examination of Galatians 6:2.

God Calls His People to Bear One Another's Burdens to Fulfill the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2)

If 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 calls Christians to care for one another, Galatians 6:2 cements that calling. Galatians 6:2 tells Christians that they *must* care for one another as this is a requirement to fulfill the law of Christ. A careful exegesis of Galatians 6:2 displays that God calls his people to bear one another's burdens to fulfill the law of Christ. This verse will be broken into two primary sections. In the first section, what it means to "bear one another's burdens" is examined, and then the meaning of "fulfill the law of Christ" is investigated.

Bear One Another's Burdens

In Galatians 6:2, Paul commands the Galatian Christians to "bear one another's burdens." In the original language he front-loads the sentence by placing "one another's" before the verb "bear." This adds emphasis to Paul's call for Christians to care for one another. As Timothy George points out, "We all have burdens, and God does not intend for us to carry them by ourselves in isolation from our brothers and sisters."¹⁹

The verb translated "bear" is "βαστάζετε" and has the additional interpretive meaning of "to carry." Βαστάζετε is found in the present imperative tense, therefore it

¹⁹ Timothy. George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 413.

conveys ongoing action along with the command, to the effect of “keep carrying.”²⁰ Paul is encouraging the believers to continually, always, bear with one another and carry each other’s burdens. Similar to what has already been observed in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Fung notes that to “‘carry each other’s burdens’ is to manifest a God-like quality.”²¹ When God’s people support one another, they are reflecting the way that God cares for his people.

Many commentators differ in opinion regarding what Paul is referring to as “burdens.” The phrase translated as “burdens” is “τὰ βάρη,” and more literally means “weight,” but it is often used throughout the New Testament to mean “oppressive burden.”²² There are at least three major opinions on what Paul intends by these “burdens.” First, one common understanding limits Paul’s usage of burden to what Paul was discussing in the preceding verse. In verse one, Paul states, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Burton, for one, believes that Paul is just continuing his teaching on sin and temptation. He argues, “The reference of τὰ βάρη is clearly to that especially which is spoken of in the preceding verse, viz., the burden of temptation and possible ensuing sin.”²³

A second option for the understanding of the word “burdens” is proposed by Strelan in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Strelan believes that this term is referring to helping financially needy believers. The primary thrust of his argument is based upon τὰ

²⁰ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 178.

²¹ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 287.

²² Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 275.

²³ Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 329.

βάρη's usage elsewhere in Scripture. As Schreiner points out, this reading is far too specific given that Paul makes this sort of burden-bearing a requirement to “fulfill the law of Christ.”²⁴

The third, and preferred, view of the meaning of “burdens” defends a more generic understanding of the term. Schreiner prefers this more broad understanding “since believers have a variety of burdens that cannot be equated with sin, such as persecution, financial difficulties, sickness, and the like.”²⁵ Fung holds the same position as Schreiner arguing that “since the ‘law of Christ’ entails much more than the mutual bearing of the burdens of temptation and sin, the ‘heavy loads’ are better understood, more comprehensively, of all kinds of weaknesses...”²⁶

In the first half of this verse, Paul is calling all believers to bear one another's burdens. This should be a normal and natural part of Christian life. All Christians have burdens that they bear, “and God does not intend for us to carry them by ourselves in isolation from our brothers and sisters.”²⁷ In the second half of the verse, Paul emphatically defends his call to bear one another's burdens by rooting the command as necessary to “fulfill the law of Christ.”

Fulfill the Law of Christ

Paul supplies the ground for his command to “bear one another's burdens” with the phrase, “and so fulfill the law of Christ.” This phrase, “fulfill the law of Christ,” only appears in this verse within the entire New Testament, although similar expression

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 358.

²⁵ Schreiner, 358.

²⁶ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 287.

²⁷ George, *Galatians*, 413.

appears in 1 Corinthians 9:21 when Paul says, “under the law of Christ.”²⁸ Longenecker observes that this phrase, “the law of Christ,” has been the subject of “extensive discussion” among biblical scholars. He continues by listing three different interpretive options.²⁹

First, some commentators believe that the law of Christ is referring to the “principles of the example and teachings of Jesus... in effect, while not being of the same nature as the law of Moses, taking the place of the law.”³⁰ Schreiner points out that this view is “sometimes linked to the rabbinic view that the law would cease when the messianic age was inaugurated.”³¹ This belief lifts the teachings of Jesus to similar ethical position as the law of Moses in the life of the Christians. Even though Christ’s teaching is surely authoritative in the life of the believer, this position is not the most attractive. As Fung observes, “there is no sufficient evidence to show that Paul knew such a tradition of ethical teaching...”³²

Second, others hold to the view that Paul used this phrase “only polemically in an *ad hominem* fashion either to outclass his opponents in their use of νόμος (law) or to mock his Galatian converts’ obsession with Mosaic legislation.”³³ Fung seems to support this position at least in part when he states that “[Paul] speaks of the ‘the law of Christ’ polemically, if not almost playfully, as an antithesis to ‘the law of Moses.’”³⁴ This position points out the winsome word play of Paul in this letter, and it does not seem to be mutually exclusive to the third and final position.

²⁸ Morris, *Galatians*, 179.

²⁹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 275.

³⁰ Longenecker, 275.

³¹ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 359.

³² Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 288.

³³ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 275.

³⁴ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 287.

Finally, the best understanding of the “law of Christ,” and the majority position among scholars, is that it should merely be read as “the central and all-inclusive principle of love” put forward by Christ.³⁵ Schreiner supports this position by keenly observing, “The ‘law of Christ’ is equivalent to the law of love, so when believers carry the burdens of others, they behave as Christ did and fulfill his law.”³⁶ Fung also understands the “law of Christ” in this way, supporting his position by saying, “the merit of this interpretation of ‘the law of Christ’ is that it reasonably links the ‘law’ with the ‘commandment’ of Jesus and agrees with the emphasis on love in the preceding section of the letter.”³⁷ Bruce agrees, stating, “The ‘law of Christ’ is not essentially different from the commandment of love to one’s neighbor, in which ‘the whole law’ is comprehended.”³⁸ Given the context and the overwhelming support by commentators, the law of Christ almost certainly refers to the command to love your neighbor.

The implications of this passage on biblical counseling are exceedingly large. Biblical counseling is not just about correcting views about God or speaking words of wisdom, but a large amount of biblical counseling is about bearing one another’s burdens. Biblical counseling is a helping relationship where one believer helps another through life’s unique struggles with the hope of the gospel. In this way, biblical counseling is not just for a select few who have been trained in graduate schools, but is a command for all those in the church. Bearing each other’s burdens is required to fulfill the law of Christ, and that is what biblical counseling seeks to do. No Christian is exempt from the call to care for one another in this way.

Thus far, two passages have been examined, both of which support this

³⁵ Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 329.

³⁶ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 360.

³⁷ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 289.

³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 261.

project's definition of biblical counseling as a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another's unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through an examination of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, I detailed how God is the source of all comfort, and he gives that comfort to his people in order for them to comfort one another. The only thing God's people have to offer suffering people is the comfort that they have received from God. Believers must encourage one another with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Second, I showed how God's people are called to bear one another's burdens in order to fulfill the law of Christ. All of God's people are commanded to care for one another; thus, they should all have a vested interest in biblical counseling. There is no avoiding the biblical call for Christians to care for one another! Any helping relationship where one seeks to speak gospel hope into the life of another is a biblical counseling type of relationship.

Next, I explain how different people require different approaches depending upon their personal context. All people struggle uniquely. Biblical counseling cannot be a wooden, formulaic process of caring for individuals. In order to properly care for someone, a biblical counselor must seek to understand those unique struggles and then apply the gospel winsomely to that particular situation.

Different People Need Different Approaches Depending Upon Personal Context (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Paul begins the passage by addressing the church using the phrase, "we urge you, brothers." A minority of commentators believe that Paul is directly addressing these commandments to the leadership of the church due to the fact that the word "admonish" appears next in the verse was previously used in verse 12 to specifically address the leaders' function in the church.³⁹ This view is not acceptable given the context of the

³⁹Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*,

word “brothers.” In verses 12 and 14, Paul uses this term “brothers” as a figure of speech for the entire church body. It is apparent in verse 12 that Paul is addressing the entire church body and not just the leaders because he commands the “brothers” to “respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.”⁴⁰ Paul gives no reason to believe that he has changed who he was referring to as “brothers” between the two verses. As Fee observes, “even though leaders will be expected to take the lead, these concerns are in fact, as always in Paul, matters in which the whole community is to be engaged.”⁴¹

David Powlison argues that this understanding of the church body relating to one another as “brothers” gives the biblical paradigm for the ‘counselor-counselee’ relationship. As opposed to paradigms rooted in science, animal training, mere intentional friendship, medicine and the like; Powlison calls for a counseling relationship paradigm that is what he calls “familial.” He draws upon this language with this illustration,

Imagine a large family. The children range in age from infants to young adults. Their competencies range from the utterly helpless and dependent (infants and disabled) to those who are able to look after others. Some behave in destructive ways; others are anxious; some have a very limited capacity; others are responsible and constructive. Within the family, care occurs at two complementary levels. The primary responsibility for love lies with the parents. But secondarily, the older children take on active parental responsibilities towards their younger brothers and sisters.⁴²

The church is a family, and all families have different people with specific needs that require specialized care. All people have unique struggles that require unique gospel application. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul presents three different unique struggles

The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 196.

⁴⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 122.

⁴¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 209.

⁴² David Powlison, “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 2.

and the appropriate form of care that accompanies each. I will divide this section into the four commands given in the passage: warn the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

Admonish the Idle

Paul begins his series of commands by directing the church to “admonish the idle.” As previously noted, this word for “admonish” (νουθετέω) appeared merely two verses prior. In verse 12, Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers that the elders of the church are to “admonish” them, but here he expands that admonishing responsibility to everyone else in the church.

The word translated as “idle” is “ἀτάκτους,” and it is the subject of a great deal of discussion among commentators. This form of the word only appears here in the New Testament, though it is quite prevalent throughout ancient literature.⁴³ Fee notes that the term has had “an interesting bit of translational history” given how it has changed in English translation and meaning over the years. He further notes that the King James Version had “correctly rendered it ‘the unruly’” before more modern translators changed the word to “idlers.” While the unruly in this passage were actually idlers, Fee asserts that to translate the term as “idlers” does not have a “lexical leg to stand on.”⁴⁴

The term “ἀτάκτους” most literally refers to a soldier who has not kept in rank.⁴⁵ Beale suggests that the terms “unruly,” “disorderly,” or “disruptive” would serve as better translations.⁴⁶ Given this better translation, the reader is left to wonder just who these “unruly” Thessalonians are. Because the adverbial form of ἀτάκτους appears three

⁴³ G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 163.

⁴⁴ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 209.

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 105.

⁴⁶ Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 164.

times in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11, most commentators agree that this is the same group that Paul has in mind in 1 Thessalonians 5:14.⁴⁷ In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul is clearly concerned about those who are refusing to work. In Paul's mind, there is a clear connection between the lazy and unruly.

With that said, it is not merely the lazy that Paul has in mind to receive this admonition, but those who “neglect their daily duty and live in idleness, at the expense of others.”⁴⁸ Just one verse prior to this one, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to “live at peace among yourselves,” and this “unruly” behavior is an enemy of the peace that Paul wishes them to have. As Beale diligently observes, “The Christian ethic requires work until the day of death or until Christ returns (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:10-12). Not to do so results in a bad testimony to the unbelieving world.”⁴⁹

Practically, what does it mean to “admonish the idle (or unruly)”? Powlison offers his helpful thoughts on the topic, “When a specific form of unruliness is on the table, the counseling process will tend towards the clear cut, direct, and even dramatic... When you need to help someone straighten out, talk straight. Spell out right and wrong.”⁵⁰ There are many within the context of the local church who need to be challenged with the truth of God's word so that they will immediately change their behavior. From my anecdotal observations, biblical counseling has traditionally excelled at the “admonish the idle” aspect within the familial paradigm, but the next two commands that Paul gives in this verse have been more difficult for the movement as a whole.

⁴⁷ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 196.

⁴⁸ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 122.

⁴⁹ Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 165.

⁵⁰ Powlison, “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” 9.

Encourage the Fainthearted

Paul's second command in this verse is to "encourage the fainthearted." There is very little conversation among biblical scholars regarding the term translated here as "encourage." The Greek verb used is *παραμυθεῖσθε* and it "can be used in the general sense of to encourage or in the more specific sense of to console or to comfort in the face of death or a tragic event."⁵¹ The translation "encourage" seems appropriate and easily understood.

This word for "fainthearted" is the Greek term *ὀλιγοψύχους*. Martin points out that it is a compound Greek term that sandwiches together the words "*ὀλιγος*" (meaning "few" or "little") and *ψύχη* (meaning "life" or "soul").⁵² Thus, the word more literally translates into something more like "small of soul."⁵³ Wanamaker describes it as an adjective that is "rather indefinite in meaning and could apply to worry, fear, or discouragement."⁵⁴ The King James Version unfortunately translates the term as "feble-minded," which is perceived as more negative to modern ears than what the Greek term intends.⁵⁵

Many scholars have spilled a great deal of ink hypothesizing just who Paul is referring to as the "fainthearted" in this passage. Looking at the rest of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, Martin suggests that Paul could be referring to those who are discouraged following "the death of fellow Christians (4:13-18), persecution by non-Christians (2:14-16), attempting and sometimes failing to live according to a new ethic (4:3-8), the absence of the evangelists (2:17-20), and various trials and temptations

⁵¹ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 197.

⁵² D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 177.

⁵³ Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 165.

⁵⁴ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 197.

⁵⁵ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 210.

(3:5).”⁵⁶ Fee proposes that they could be “disheartened because they had incorrect expectations about the ‘soon’ coming of the Lord.” Stott conjectures that these fainthearted believers could be “those anxious either about their friends who had died or about their own salvation.”⁵⁷

Given all of these different theories surrounding the identity of the “fainthearted,” what seems most clear is that modern commentators do not know exactly who they were, and that it ultimately does not matter. The implications on the church today remain the same. Fainthearted, “small-souled” believers in the church need encouragement. This type of care stands in stark contrast to the care prescribed toward the “unruly” in the church. Fainthearted believers do not need “admonishing,” but rather they need encouragement. Different people need unique gospel applications given their unique context. Powlison elaborates on what this sort of care may look like in the counseling room,

When Paul says, “Encourage the fainthearted,” he means just that. Come alongside tenderly... Bring true hope. God is true to His promises. Communicate how God is faithful by what you say and do. By how you say it and do it, by who you are, by how you care. Give strugglers every reason to go forward into life: ‘God will not forsake you. He is with you.’ Take the initiative to come near and stay near to the disheartened. Love does this.⁵⁸

Help the Weak

Paul continues his four-fold directions with the phrase, “help the weak.” The Greek for this phrase is “ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν.” The word “ἀντέχεσθε” is translated as “help” in most English translations, and it captures the idea of “hold on to them.”⁵⁹ Paul has already encouraged the church to “admonish the unruly” and “encourage the

⁵⁶ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 178.

⁵⁷ Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 122.

⁵⁸ Powlison, “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” 10.

⁵⁹ Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 195.

fainthearted,” now he is telling them that there are some that they just have to hold on to and not let go.

Again, the commentators are divided and unsure as to the identity of these “weak” Thessalonians. Paul does not elaborate upon the nature of the weakness, and scholars find it difficult to determine their identity. The nature of the weakness could really be anything. They could be those who are morally, psychologically, spiritually, or even economically weak.⁶⁰ Regardless of the nature of this weakness, Fee rightly observes “whoever they are, they need support.”⁶¹ The weak are simply those whose strength is limited and need outside assistance.

Practically speaking, this means that Paul “sought to give the whole community a sense of pastoral responsibility.”⁶² How is a church member or a biblical counselor to go about “helping the weak”? Unsurprisingly, Powlison is again helpful in these practical implications, “Take it literally. Don’t ever let go of people whose capacities are limited.”⁶³ The body of Christ is called to holistically take care of its members, which includes “holding on” to those who are incapable of making it through life unassisted.

Be Patient with Them All

Finally, Paul gives a “summarizing admonition” following his three case specific directions.⁶⁴ The idle, fainthearted, and weak are all unique cases within the church that require individualized care. This last command reminds the Thessalonian

⁶⁰ Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 166.

⁶¹ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 211.

⁶² Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 198.

⁶³ Powlison, “Familial Counseling: The Paradigm for Counselor-Counselee Relationships in 1 Thessalonians 5,” 12.

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 211.

believers to be patient as they care for these more specialized cases. All those who practice biblical counseling will find themselves running out of patience for the more difficult cases, but here Paul is encouraging the people of God to continue in their faithfulness in patience.

This term that Paul uses for “patience” is not the most common term that Paul uses for patience. Paul typically used the word “ὕπομονή” for patience, but here he chose the word “μακροθυμεῖτε.” Fee observes that Paul’s word choice “originated as a way of describing those who were ‘long-tempered.’ While “ὕπομονή” is usually used for enduring difficult situations, “μακροθυμεῖτε” is more appropriate for enduring difficult relationships.⁶⁵ To be patient with others in this fashion is both a fruit of the spirit and a characteristic of God that is reflected through humans made in his image.⁶⁶

Thus far, I have established a biblical and theological foundation to support biblical counseling as a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another’s unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have done this by first showing how God comforts his people so that they will comfort one another with the gospel of Jesus through an exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Then I displayed how God’s people must bear one another’s burdens in order to fulfill the law of Christ by studying Galatians 6:2. Next I showed how understanding one’s unique struggles is crucial for gospel application through an analysis of 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Finally, the discussion will terminate by showing that the church is the primary context for biblical counseling with an examination of Ephesians 4:11-12.

The Church Is the Primary Context for Biblical Counseling (Ephesians 4:11-12)

I conclude this defense of biblical counseling as a helping relationship where

⁶⁵ Fee, 211.

⁶⁶ Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 123.

one seeks to understand another's unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ with an exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-12. The hope of examining this passage is to show that the church is the primary context for biblical counseling, and all of God's people are called to be participants in this sort of ministry. This passage can be divided into two primary sections. First, God gives leaders to the church, and second, Church leaders equip the saint for the work of ministry.

God Gives Leaders to the Church (Ephesians 4:11)

This passage highlights five different types of giftings that God gives to his church. God's gift to the church is his people. Here is a list of particular people God has given to the church to proclaim the word of God and lead the people of God.⁶⁷ This list is not intended to be exhaustive of all the different types of people which God can give to his church, but rather "those that are named exercise their ministries in such a way as to help other members of the church to exercise their own respective ministries."⁶⁸

There are five different giftings listed in this passage: apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher. Commentators usually fall into one of two camps with regards to how they understand these five giftings. Some commentators attempt to divide these giftings into two sections, first being the ceased gifts of apostle and prophet, and second being the continuing giftings of evangelist, shepherd, and teacher.⁶⁹ Another set of commentators do not see any intended division within the list and see all the gifts as having continued importance for the church into the modern age. This second option is preferred. The argument that this list must be divided must be rooted in historical or

⁶⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 249.

⁶⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 345.

⁶⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

theological grounds since there is nothing in this passage to show any sort of division.⁷⁰

Markus Barth argues eloquently for this position,

“In 4:11 it is assumed that the church at all times needs the witness of ‘apostles’ and ‘prophets. The author of this epistle did not anticipate that the inspired and enthusiastic ministry was to be absorbed by, and ‘disappear’ into, offices and officers bare of the Holy Spirit and resentful of any reference to spiritual things Eph 4 does not contain the faintest hint that the charismatic character of all church ministries was restricted to a certain period of church history and was later to die out.”⁷¹

These five gifted leaders play an important role in the life of God’s church.

The “apostles” (ἀποστόλους) could be understood in three different ways in the New Testament. The word itself simply means “messenger” and the New Testament uses it in this fashion in at least one place (Philippians 2:25). It could also be referring to the designation given to the twelve disciples following the ascension of Christ. Finally, the term was later expanded upon by Paul to include others who served a foundational purpose in the early church.⁷² This sense of the term “apostle” found in this passage “likely extend[s] beyond the Twelve and Paul to include others whom the Lord Jesus has called to go, establish churches, and ground these new believers in the common faith.”⁷³ Similarly, the prophets Paul refers to are not the same as the Old Testament prophets of old, but rather are “new covenant people through whom God speaks.”⁷⁴

The evangelists in this passage refer to those who have been gifted by God at proclaiming the word toward those outside of the faith. This gift is not exercised “in the church” per se, but it is certainly exercised “for the church.”⁷⁵ The evangelists work in

⁷⁰ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 257.

⁷¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 437.

⁷² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd edition, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 126.

⁷³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 256.

⁷⁴ Arnold, 257.

⁷⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 347.

concert along with the shepherds and the teachers, whose primary function is the work of caring for the saints within the context of the local church. Some commentators attempt to combine these last two giftings into one gifting of “shepherd/teacher.”⁷⁶ While there is a theological argument to be made in favor of this understanding, Arnold details why this understanding is not grammatically favored, and it should be rejected.⁷⁷

Although the term “pastor” is used prevalently in protestant churches today, this is the only occurrence of the term in the New Testament.⁷⁸ The shepherds and teachers work together to care for the body of Christ through the ministry of the word. The shepherds’ focus is more in personal ministry, and the teachers emphasize ministry in the public sphere of the church. Paul’s purpose in listing these five gifts to leadership in the church is not to attempt to establish new offices within the local church, but rather to recognize the unique giftings that God gives to leaders and officers within the church.

Church Leaders Equip the Saints for the Work of Ministry (Ephesians 4:12)

Verse twelve functions as the purpose clause for God gifting the churches with the leaders. God gifts Christian leaders in this way in order “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” There are two views on how to read this passage. Because this verse is made up of three prepositional phrases, some scholars (particularly Roman Catholic and some Anglican) interpret them to be coordinate with one another. If this position is to be accepted, then the full weight of “equipping the saints,” “the work of service,” and the “building up of the body of Christ” would rest on the clergy.

Contrary to this view, these phrases should not be understood to coordinate

⁷⁶ Bruce, 348.

⁷⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 260.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 347.

with each other. The first phrase is marked with the preposition “πρὸς” while the second and third begin with “εἰς.” There is not sufficient parallelism to support such an understanding.⁷⁹ Instead, these phrases should be understood as dependent upon one another, leading the reader to understand this passage to be understood as God giving the church leaders to equip the saints *to do* the work of ministry *which is* the building up of the body of Christ.⁸⁰

The word rendered “ministry” in most English translations is the Greek term *διακονία*. This term is also used throughout the scripture to refer to general works of “service” and is the source of the transliterated word for what churches call “deacons.” Foulkes observes that this verse implies that “every Christian has a work of ministry, a spiritual task and function in the body.”⁸¹ This work of ministry is for the building up of the body of Christ. The church grows and matures as a result of the ministry done by regular members within the context of the local church.

Later in chapter 4, Paul supplies more details as to the nature of the work of ministry. Verse 15 states that through “speaking the truth in love,” the church is grown together and closer to Christ. This is the responsibility of every member within the local church. Church leaders are to equip church members to do the work of ministry so that the church may continue to grow and magnify Christ. The work of “speaking the truth in love” is the work of biblical counseling. In order to speak the truth in love, one must listen well to understand a person’s unique situation and struggles. The truth that they speak must be the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether they acknowledge it or not, mature believers all over the world are already participating in a form of this sort

⁷⁹ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 349.

⁸⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 262.

⁸¹ Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 128.

of Christian care and counseling, but it is the role of church leaders to continue to equip them to do this work of ministry more effectively.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide the foundational biblical and theological support for biblical counseling that is a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another's unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The exegesis of four passages supported this thesis by showing that (1) Christians receive the comfort of God so that they may help others who are suffering, (2) Christians are called to bear one another's burdens to fulfill the law of Christ, (3) different people need different approaches depending up on their personal context, (4) the church is the primary context for biblical counseling. The next chapter will discuss theoretical, practical, and historical issues related to biblical counseling by showing that a gospel city movement will best be supported by a culture of biblical counseling that is gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically-informed.

CHAPTER 3
DEFINING AND DEFENDING THE CORE VALUES OF
THE BOSTON CENTER FOR BIBLICAL
COUNSELING

The purpose of this project is to increase knowledge about biblical counseling to support a gospel city movement in Boston, Massachusetts. Chapter 2 established the biblical foundations for biblical counseling. The purpose of this chapter is to define and defend the core values of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling. I argue that the most affective counseling to support a gospel city movement is gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically informed.¹

In order to support this thesis, I examined what each of these terms means. First, I demonstrate why truly biblical counseling must inherently be gospel-centered. Second, I examine what it means to be church-based, and I offer a model for a para-church counseling center to partner with local churches. Third, I display why a good understanding of clinical research and methods can be helpful when practicing biblical counseling.

Gospel-Centered

Biblical counseling must be gospel-centered because the gospel is at the center of the message of the Bible. A misunderstanding of this simple principle has fueled many of the critiques aimed toward the philosophy and methodology of the biblical counseling movement throughout the past half-century. Biblical counseling has often been

¹ I was first introduced to these terms by Jason Kovacs, then of the Austin Stone Counseling Center in Texas, and now serving at Gospel Care Collective in Washington state. Jason gladly gave me permission to use these terms and to write about them here.

caricatured as merely encouraging hurting people to “take two verses and see me in the morning.” While the thought-leaders of the biblical counseling movement have always held a philosophy of the care of souls that is more nuanced than the caricature suggests; the reality is that the everyday trenches of pastoral counseling yield a wide spectrum for how counselors practically view and use the Bible when trying to help a counselee. In this section, I will explain the importance of a gospel-centered biblical hermeneutic and demonstrate how to apply the Bible in a gospel-centered fashioned.

Within the biblical counseling movement, there is a huge emphasis on the sufficiency of Scripture, but there seems to be a much smaller emphasis, not to mention consensus, on the proper interpretation and application of Scripture.² Biblical counseling practitioners need to realize that in order for counseling to truly be “biblical” one must not only assert the sufficiency of Scripture, but also the proper interpretation of that Scripture. When Satan was tempting Christ in the wilderness in Matthew 4, he used the Scriptures as if he believed that they are sufficient and authoritative, but he certainly missed the proper interpretation. Biblical counseling must be gospel-centered because the gospel is at the center of the message of the Bible.

When helping counselees with the truth of the Scripture, there are at least two essential skills one must learn to do so in a gospel-centered way. First, one must learn how to properly read every Scripture within the context of the overarching story of Scripture. This means that biblical counselors need to have a strong understanding of hermeneutics and the gospel-shaped story of the Scripture. Second, one must learn how to apply that message to the story of each counselee. Every counselee comes with a story and a way of interpreting the world. It is the role of the counselor to show the counselee

² For example, in 2017, Heath Lambert curated a "95 Theses for an Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling." This list of theses mentions the sufficiency of Scripture approximately 95 times, while never explicitly mentioning the gospel or the overarching gospel-shaped story of the Bible. Heath Lambert, "95 Theses for an Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling," *Association of Certified Biblical Counselors* (blog), accessed October 10, 2019, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/ninety-five/>.

how they fit into God’s story, and how the message of the gospel can help them with every struggle in life.

Hermeneutics in Counseling

Second Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This passage certainly means that Scripture is inspired and authoritative, but more than that, it also means that Scripture is written by a single author, God. As Michael Lawrence asserts, “despite the plethora of human authors, behind the text of Scripture stands a single divine author, a single mind and will.”³ Lawrence continues to state that “the Bible as a whole is best understood as a narrative... Scholars would call it a meta narrative; a story that explains everything and so provides us with a worldview.”⁴

Behind all of the smaller stories collected into the sixty-six books of divinely inspired Scripture, is a meta-narrative of God’s redemptive work in Christ that binds them all together. Renowned biblical theologian Graeme Goldsworthy puts it like this: “We can say that, while not all Scripture is the gospel, all Scripture is related to the gospel that is its centre.”⁵ In order for biblical counseling to truly “biblical,” it must be gospel-centered. Counselors cannot use the Bible merely as a list of do’s or don’ts, or as a set of timeless principles, or a casebook of characters to imitate or avoid.⁶ The Bible is the story of God creating, redeeming, and re-creating the world through Jesus. As Southern Seminary professor Robert Plummer says, “the person and saving work of Jesus

³ Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 63.

⁶ Michael R. Emler uses these as examples for "what the Bible is not" in his *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 23-38.

Christ is the ultimate focus of God’s revelation.”⁷

Although the overarching message of the Bible is the story of Jesus, this is not to say that the Bible should only be organized or applied according to this story. The meta narrative of Scripture does not negate the imperatives of the gospel. The work of biblical theologians is to organize the story of the Bible according to the meta narrative of Scripture, while the work of systematic theologians is to organize the story of the Bible according to topics. Both are valid ways of organizing the Bible, and they both methods need one another for balance. Timothy Keller draws out the dangers of each approach being practiced in isolation. Keller refers to biblical theology as the “Redemptive Historical Method (RHM).”

The [Systematic Theological Method (STM)], carried out in isolation from the RHM can produce a Christianity that is rationalistic, legalistic, and individualistic. Similarly, the RHM, carried out in isolation from the STM, tends to produce a Christianity that loves narrative and community but shies away from sharp distinctions between grace and law and between truth and heresy.⁸

There are a few methods used to show that Christ is at the heart of every passage, even Old Testament passages. These methods have been described multiple times over in preaching texts such as *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* by Edmund Clowney,⁹ or *Preaching* by Timothy Keller,¹⁰ or *Preaching the Whole Counsel of God* by Julius Kim,¹¹ or *The Christ-Centered Expositor* by Tony Merida,¹² but I have found the

⁷ Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 151.

⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 40.

⁹ Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015).

¹¹ Julius Kim, *Preaching the Whole Counsel of God: Design and Deliver Gospel-Centered Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

¹² Tony Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

emphasis to be far more limited within the literature of the biblical counseling world. The only full-length exception to my knowledge is *CrossTalk* by Michael Emlet. I believe that many pastors who preach gospel-centered sermons using proper biblical theology forget those hermeneutical techniques when it comes to the counseling room. As David Powlison states, “The differences between preaching and counseling are not conceptual but only methodological.”¹³

In *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, Edmund Clowney presents a fantastic diagram that displays a proper hermeneutic when it comes to reading the Old Testament for all that it is worth.

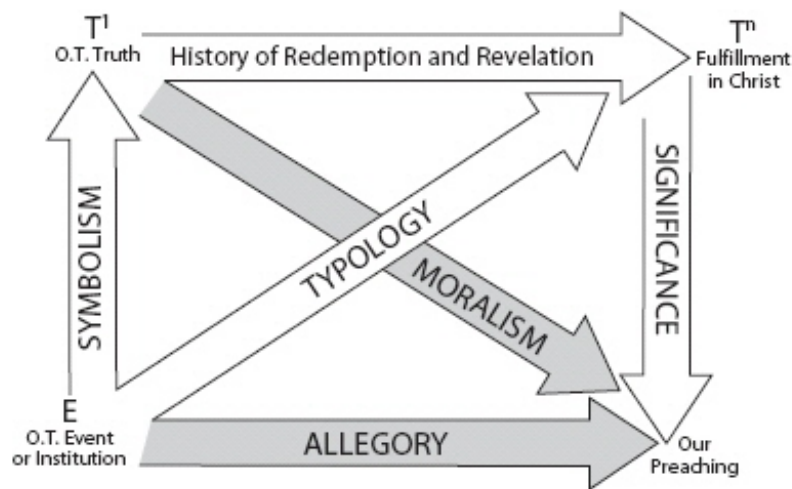


Figure 2. Clowney’s hermeneutical rectangle¹⁴

This rectangle displays many appropriate and inappropriate ways to understand and apply the Old Testament. The rectangle starts in the bottom-left corner with an Old Testament event or institution. This event or institution can be understood as a type of

¹³ David Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 29.

¹⁴ Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 32.

Christ or as symbolism leading toward an Old Testament truth but should never be immediately taken into application as this leads to allegory. One may trace an Old Testament truth through the history of redemption and revelation toward fulfillment in Christ, but should not be taking immediately into application, lest one practice moralism. The goal with this rectangle is to get the preacher to take the extra step of showing how Christ is at the center of every Old Testament Scripture before making an application to the congregation.

The story of David and Goliath can serve as a prime example of this sort of interpretation and application. The “biblical event” in Clowney’s rectangle occurs in the familiar story from 1 Samuel where David as a young boy fights the giant Goliath using only a few stones and slingshot. Over the years, I have heard many local preachers go straight from the biblical event to preaching through the allegory path. In one sermon found online, the preacher stated that each of David’s five stones represented something we all need to fight our giants: faith, obedience, service, prayer, and the Holy Ghost.¹⁵ This is clearly allegory and not a good interpretation of this biblical event according to Clowney’s rectangle. I have also heard many preachers correctly decipher a biblical truth from the passage, such as “God calls his people to be courageous,” only to take the moralism path by saying something like, “you too can slay the giants in your life through courage!” In order to properly apply this passage, one must take the additional step of viewing this biblical event in light of the greater story of Scripture. One valid path toward this biblical application would be to draw on the typology of Jesus being the greater David, who courageously goes before his people to win the battle on their behalf! This application displays spiritual significance for the hearer while also showing Jesus’s central role in the story of Scripture.

¹⁵ Stephen McGary, “Five Smooth Stones of: Faith, Obedience, Service, Prayer, and Holy Ghost,” July 10, 2001, https://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/transcripts/devotionals/2001_07_10_mcgary.htm.

Conspicuously missing from the core values of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling is the term “biblical.” This is because to be “biblical” in counseling is to be gospel-centered. At its heart, the Bible is primarily a story about God’s redemptive works in Jesus. A proper hermeneutic is required for effective biblical counseling, but a hermeneutic is only half the battle. A counselor must also be able to apply this correct interpretation of Scripture to the real life of a counselee in a gospel-centered fashion.

Biblical Application in Counseling

The goal of biblical counseling is for the counselee to experience the gospel. We want everyone, everywhere to grasp the life-changing truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. Every person who walks into a counseling room comes with a unique set of struggles ranging from intense suffering to stubborn sin, but each and every person, regardless of spiritual background, needs the same gospel message. As Robert Cheong states, “Whether we are counseling an unbelieving neighbor, a newly baptized believer, or a grandmother who has been walking with Jesus for decades, everyone needs the same gospel.”¹⁶

The best way for a biblical counselor to help a counselee to experience the gospel is through listening carefully to their story and helping them to understand their own stories within the context of God’s story. Michael Emlet states that “Listening to how people make sense of the details of their lives gives a sense of the overarching story or stories that guide their daily existence.”¹⁷ It is the job of the biblical counselor to help the counselee to reinterpret their own story in light of God’s story. To understand someone’s story is to build a relationship with that person, and counseling is best done within the place of relationship. Paul Tripp articulates this idea in this way,

¹⁶ Robert Cheong, “The Centrality of the Gospel,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013).

¹⁷ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 67.

“[Relationships are] the only context in which the lifelong process of change can take place... God’s purpose is that these relationships would be workrooms in which his work of change can thrive.”¹⁸

After a counselor understands a counselee’s story, they help them to understand how the gospel story of Scripture intersects with their own personal story. Emlet puts it this way: “Application happens when people ‘inhabit’ the worldview of the text in such a way that they gain gospel-centered clarity and direction for their situation – and act on it! This is what connecting Scripture and life is all about!”¹⁹ This is what Ephesians 4:15 is talking about when it teaches believers to “speak the truth in love.” Paul Tripp says that “speaking the truth in love does not mean making grand pronouncements. It means helping your friend to see her life more clearly.”²⁰

Keller states that the goal of preaching is to lead others to an “encounter with the King so that the rule of Christ extends over the lives of the hearers.”²¹ He goes on to assert that “the goals of evangelism and edification are subordinate to the goal of worship in preaching.” I believe that these same statements are realities in biblical counseling as well. Biblical counselors need to be able to enter the lives of their counsees in such a way to dynamically present the message of the gospel in a way that leads those they are helping to experience the Lord in worship. This is what it means to do counseling that is gospel-centered.

Church-Based

The only hope for biblical counseling to support a gospel city movement is for

¹⁸ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Resources for Changing Lives. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 110.

¹⁹ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 90.

²⁰ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 111.

²¹ Timothy Keller, “A Model for Preaching (Part One),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1994), 37.

it to be church-based. Our vision at the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling is to foster a culture of care throughout the Greater Boston region so that everyone who desires gospel-centered biblical counseling can receive it. The reality behind that vision is that we as an organization, in and of ourselves, are completely incapable of seeing it to fruition. The only way that we can foster a culture of care in this way is through partnering with local churches and offering counseling that is church-based. In this section, the church is shown to be essential for biblical counseling to work, and church-based counseling in a parachurch setting is defined and defended.

The Church is Essential for Biblical Counseling

The church can be defined as a local community of believers who covenant to live out their Christian lives together as a church. This means that these believers commit to practice the “one-anothers” of the New Testament together, such as love one another, bear with one another, and speak the truth in love to one another. Discipleship is one of the necessary duties of the local church. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives the disciples what modern readers know as the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Churches must practice discipleship, and biblical counseling is intrinsically linked to discipleship. As Deepak Reju and Mark Dever argue, biblical counseling is “a subset of discipleship and deals with the more problematic and difficult aspects of life to handle...”²²

This means that biblical counseling belongs in the church in the same way that discipleship belongs in the church. Some biblical counselors try to separate ordinary discipleship from biblical counseling, but Garrett Higbee puts discipleship and

²² Deepak Reju and Mark Dever, “The Health of the Church and Biblical Counseling,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 251.

counseling on a continuous spectrum. Instead of seeing discipleship and counseling as two highly-related, but separate tasks; Higbee puts discipleship and counseling on a single continuum. This continuum begins with intentional conversations, and then leads to directive conversation, which leads to corrective, and finally leads to intensive counseling.²³ This is an especially helpful way to look at how discipleship and counseling relate. The two are attempting to achieve the same thing with the same methods, but as one makes their way down the continuum, more training and skill is required of the counselor/discipler.

The church is absolutely the best place for biblical counseling ministry to take place. To borrow an illustration from David Powlison, the personal ministry of the word through the form of counseling is one leg of the three-legged stool of church ministry. Preaching the word and personal devotion are two of the legs, but the stool cannot stand without the third leg.²⁴ Powlison, as an advocate for the parachurch organizations of CCEF and the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, also mentions that “every person committed to counsel biblically is, by definition, committed to seeing counseling restored as a core ministry of local churches.”²⁵

Due to their commitment for churches to function as “discipleship factories,” Rob Green and Steve Viars assert that they not only want churches to “*have* a counseling ministry, but to *be* a counseling ministry.” Green and Viars believe that the church should be a counseling ministry, but they do so from the perspective of a very large church with a lot of resources in a cultural climate that is friendly to biblical counseling. They describe their church as “offering well over 3,000 hours of free counseling to both the

²³ Garrett Higbee, “Biblical Counseling and Soul Care in the Church,” in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 59.

²⁴ David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2005), 108.

²⁵ David Powlison and Heath Lambert, “Biblical Counseling in Local Churches and Parachurch Ministries,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 33, no. 2 (2019): 7–37.

community and our church family.”²⁶ Not all churches have these sorts of resources to pour into training and equipping members to do a good job with difficult cases.

Counseling must be based in the local church, but that does not mean that it must be solely located in the local church. There are many times where churches may need to partner with other churches or parachurch organizations in order to offer quality care of souls. While the church is the best place for biblical counseling ministry, there are times when churches and pastors may feel out of their depth.

Church-Based Counseling in a Parachurch Setting

The Boston Center for Biblical Counseling has around 25 endorsing churches who support the work our parachurch organization. Of those endorsing churches, the majority have merely one pastor on their staff. Of the churches with multiple pastors, very few have more than two or three pastors. Most of the pastors in Boston are not allowed the opportunity to specialize in one specific area of ministry, instead they must be generalists who attend to all the different ministry needs in their congregation. I often compare pastors in Boston to Swiss Army knives. They are able to do a lot of different functions, but they are not particularly good any one particular thing.

As a result of our cultural context, we started a parachurch biblical counseling center that can function as a “rising tide that lifts all ships.”²⁷ Our goal with the counseling center is to support local church ministry through offering more specialized biblical counseling services and equipping resources. If local pastors are Swiss Army knives, we hope to bring a scalpel to the table for intensive biblical counseling. For the remainder of this section, I will defend the parachurch model for biblical counseling, and

²⁶ Rob Green and Steve Viars, “The Biblical Counseling Ministry of the Local Church,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 225.

²⁷ I co-founded the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling along with my wife, Megan Lang, and Alasdair Groves of CCEF and his wife, Lauren Groves. We then added pastors from several local churches to form our board of directors.

then I will describe what it means to practice “church-based” counseling in a parachurch context.

In defense of parachurch counseling centers

While I have not found any published out-right condemnations of parachurch biblical counseling centers, there are certainly many who would not approve of the idea. Due to the overwhelming and appropriate commitment that most biblical counselors have for the local church, many can look disappointedly at parachurch biblical counseling. William Goode states, “Counseling is the responsibility of each believer and its only rightful arena is the church.”²⁸ John Piper states that one of his primary goals with biblical counseling is “getting counseling into the church. Where else would it be, for goodness’ sake? Can it be anywhere else and be true?”²⁹

David Powlison repeatedly defends his conviction that counseling must be church-based. He asserts, “The people of God functioning as the people of God provide the ideal and desirable institution to fix what ails us.” After making this statement, Powlison then adds a lengthy footnote about how he is including “a carefully circumscribed place for Christian workers in ‘para-church’ specialized ministries.”³⁰ Biblical counseling is rightfully meant to be church-based, and parachurch ministries only serve this mission if they come alongside churches as opposed to functioning completely separately.

Heath Lambert defends parachurch counseling centers by arguing, “If parachurch ministry is acceptable in general, then there is nothing about biblical

²⁸ William Goode, “Biblical Counseling and the Local Church,” in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 223.

²⁹ John Piper, “The Glory of God: The Goal of Biblical Counseling,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 25.

³⁰ David Powlison, “Counseling Is the Church,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002), 3.

counseling ministries in particular that is unacceptable.”³¹ Lambert and Powlison observe the appearance of many parachurch ministries in Scripture, in particular they speak of “a missionary band of apostles [who] went out to gather new Christian believers into new synagogues. These parachurch leaders pointedly established local churches.”³² There is good reason to believe that parachurch ministry is acceptable, since they appear in the Bible!

Parachurch organizations can really serve to help the churches in a community if they are properly structured. Mack Stiles articulates nine marks of healthy parachurches, the first four of which all defend and guard the proper relationship between church and parachurch.

Mark 1: A healthy parachurch ministry knows that it exists primarily to protect the church.

Mark 2: A healthy parachurch ministry makes a clear distinction between church and parachurch.

Mark 3: A healthy parachurch ministry avoids acting like a church.

Mark 4: A healthy parachurch ministry does not pressure the church to act like a parachurch.³³

While the proper location for biblical counseling is within the context of the local church, many local churches are simply unable to provide adequate care for their people. Heath Lambert puts it like this: “Given the fact that so many churches do not provide the counseling services that they should, we would actually conclude that such parachurch counseling ministries are essential for people to get the biblical care that they need.”³⁴ This is the desire of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling. Our hope is to come along-side local churches and to help local believers to get the biblical care that

³¹ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 312.

³² Powlison and Lambert, “Biblical Counseling in Local Churches and Parachurch Ministries” 12.

³³ Mack Stiles, “Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch Ministry,” *9Marks Journal* Friends or Foes? Church and Parachurch (April 2011), 7-9.

³⁴ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 312.

they need.

Church-based counseling practices

In order for the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling to thrive as a parachurch organization, we must make it our priority to serve local churches and help them to develop ministries that personally minister to their congregants in gospel-centered and meaningful ways. One of our core values is that we are “church-based,” but what does “church-based” mean in a parachurch context. At the heart of this value is a desire to come alongside local churches as opposed to doing counseling independently of local churches. There are at least four different ways that we attempt to come alongside local churches: collaborative care, equipping, consulting, and ministering to the ministers.

We are church-based in our approach to collaborative care of counselees. As far as it depends upon us, we try to involve counselees’ pastors and church community into their counseling. In our intake packet, we ask counselees to give us permission to speak with their pastor about their counseling. With most of our counselees, we get an opportunity to speak with their pastor to learn more about their unique situations while also speaking into ways that churches can better come alongside those who are receiving counseling. Sometimes we might even ask the counselee to bring a friend or pastor into a session to hear about the struggles of the counselee in a new light and the wisdom of the counselor. This usually allows this person to serve as an advocate for the counselee throughout regular life in the church.

The second way that we take a church-based approach as a parachurch organization is by equipping. While we offer counseling services, we also offer many equipping opportunities. These usually come in the format of a seminar or training session offered to specific churches or groups of churches. Once or twice a year, we will put together a larger equipping event targeted at any church members who want to come. For example, a few years ago we drew a crowd of 250 congregants and pastors when we

had a faculty member from CCEF teach on anxiety and depression.

The third way that we base our ministry in the local church is by offering consulting opportunities for pastors. Many times, pastors do not need an outside voice to swoop in and do the work, but they just need a wise and experienced counselor to point them in the right direction on a particular case. Pastors often times feel out of their depth with specific people or problems in the church, particularly when they struggle with mental illness or deeply set sinful patterns. Consulting with local pastors helps churches to care for souls.

The final way that we support local churches is by ministering to the ministers. This is an area that we are going in as an organization but has been at the heart of what we desire to do since the beginning. The pastors in our area often feel lonely and hurt, and they have very few places to turn. For whatever reason, many leaders in churches do not feel safe to share about their own personal struggles and hurts within the church. One of our goals is to care for pastors and church leaders in a way that allows them to experience the good news of the gospel for themselves. When pastors are experiencing God on a regular basis, it allows them to minister with the energy and grace that only God can provide. These are just a few ways that we hope to base our ministry in the local church.

Clinically-Informed

The Boston Center for Biblical Counseling is committed to providing counseling that is “clinically-informed.” We believe that the best way to support the gospel city movement that is occurring in Boston, MA, is to offer biblical counseling that is rooted in the Bible yet still benefits from the insights of secular psychology. This is a controversial position in the biblical counseling world as there are intramural differences in emphasis within the movement for the role of psychology and secular research. Through this section, I will explain those intramural differences, then I will defend the Bible as the

primary source for wisdom, and then I will defend a position that still finds modern psychology to be helpful.

Intramural Differences in Emphasis

Critics of the biblical counseling movement often accuse biblical counseling practitioners to be anti-psychology or anti-psychiatry. In fact, the very title of David Powlison’s dissertation fueled this critique. His dissertation was titled “Competent to Counsel?: The History of a Conservative Protestant Anti-Psychiatry Movement.” Later, when he published that dissertation, he wrote a forward declaring that “the biblical counseling movement has never been anti-psychiatry in the way that adjective tends to be heard by nonhistorians.”³⁵ Powlison’s assertion is true. The biblical counseling movement has never been truly anti-psychiatry in the way that most would understand that term, yet there is certainly a spectrum of attitudes within the movement in regard to the usage of psychology and psychiatry. There are some who quickly accept and utilize psychology, while there are others who are reticent to use any extra-biblical resources whatsoever. As Mike Emlet has asserted, “we need a balance, biblically (and scientifically!) informed approach that is neither too warmly embracing [of psychotherapies] nor too coldly dismissive.”³⁶

What binds the biblical counseling movement together is an absolute commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture in the care and cure of souls. This commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture is described well by David Powlison through what he calls “COMPIN.” He describes COMPIN by stating that the Bible has “COMPrehensive INternal resources to enable us to construct a Christian model of

³⁵ David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), XI.

³⁶ Michael R. Emlet, *Descriptions and Prescriptions: A Biblical Perspective on Psychiatric Diagnoses and Medications* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017).

personality, change, and counseling. While the modern psychologies will stimulate and inform, they do not play a constitutive role in building a robust model.”³⁷ This means that biblical counseling takes the Bible as its primary source. The Bible sets the agenda when it comes to the care and cure of souls.

If the Bible sets the agenda in the counseling room, what role should modern psychology play in the care and cure of souls? To highlight the varying opinions on this topic within the biblical counseling movement, I will examine a few examples of different attitudes and tones found throughout the movement, and then I will argue that the Bible is sufficient for counseling. I will conclude this section by arguing for a model of biblical counseling that is clinically-informed.

While there is a spectrum of ideas within the biblical counseling world on a variety of issues, but the usage of psychological ideas and theories is probably one of the biggest dividing factors within the movement. On the one hand, there are those who generally see psychology as less helpful and who take on a more combative tone toward the role of modern psychology in the care and cure of souls. On the other hand, there are those who are more welcoming and accommodating to the information gained by modern psychology. Many of the differences between these groups are more connected to semantic tone than in actual belief or practice. Those on the more conservative or combative side of things would more often be a part of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC, formerly NANC), Masters College and Seminary, or the Journal of Biblical Soul Care. Those who would generally have more willingness to see psychology as useful to biblical counseling would usually associate with the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), Westminster Seminary, or the Journal of Biblical Counseling. Again, there is a spectrum of attitudes and tones found within the

³⁷ David Powlison calls this position the COMPIN position, explaining the random capitalizations, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 17.

movement, and even within these institutions, but these generalities can be helpful when parsing through the material.

For example, Mike Emlet of CCEF wrote a book in 2017 entitled *Descriptions and Prescriptions: A Biblical Perspective on Psychiatric Diagnoses & Medications*. In the Book, Emlet adopts a friendly tone toward modern psychology, while at the same time holding to a COMPIN position regarding the role of Scripture in counseling. The Journal of Biblical Soul Care (JBSC) wrote a fairly scathing review of Emlet’s book, stating that Emlet’s assumptions regarding modern psychology, “suggest that there is an inherent value in utilizing these tools.”³⁸ The tone taken by the reviewer was far more skeptical and reticent to accept psychological research as helpful for the care and cure of souls in a counseling room.

Another example could be taken from an online article and response between then-president of ACBC, Heath Lambert, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary counseling professor, Brad Hambrick. In 2017, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, Lambert wrote a “95 Theses for an Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling.”³⁹ In this article, Lambert overgeneralizes the term “psychology” and emphasizes multiple critiques of psychology. Brad Hambrick wrote a seven-part response to Lambert’s 95 Theses, highlighting areas of agreement and disagreement. Hambrick’s summary of Lambert’s view of psychology is helpful to see the differences in tone and appreciation toward psychology,

One significant weakness in Dr. Lambert’s 95 Theses is his unclear and imprecise use of words like psychology and secular therapy. The result is either unhelpful all-or-nothing adherence from his most ardent supporters or a version of dismissal and “zoning out” from those who oppose his position or don’t care deeply about counseling debates. If we are going to beneficially influence the church at large about counseling, we will have to be clearer and more consistent in our use of terms

³⁸ Sam Stephens, “Review: Descriptions and Prescriptions,” *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2018), 109.

³⁹ Lambert, “95 Theses for an Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling.”

like “psychology” and “secular therapy.”⁴⁰

For one final example, Master’s College professor John Street also articulates a combative tone toward modern psychology. In a section for a book on how to counsel biblically, he assumes that there is very little that biblical counseling can gain from psychology, stating that the two have a “historic distrust and innate hostility.”⁴¹ Compare this to the tone and willingness to benefit from psychology found in an article by David Powlison for the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, “[biblical counselors] do fundamentally disbelieve the modern psychologies... but they still claim that something can be learned from the psychologies: wrong does not mean stupid.”⁴²

These examples display varying positions and attitudes regarding the usefulness of psychology in the field of biblical counseling. In order to continue the argument that the best biblical counseling will be clinically-informed, I will now argue for the primacy and sufficiency of the Bible (which all those in the biblical counseling movement agree upon), and then I will argue for the helpfulness of modern psychology (which not all those in the movement agree upon).

The Primacy and Sufficiency of the Bible

Every word found in the Bible is divinely inspired.⁴³ Inside the Bible is everything that every person needs in every nation on earth for life and godliness.⁴⁴ While the Scripture is sufficient, one must recognize that it is not sufficient for everything. The Scripture is certainly sufficient for me to learn all that I need to know

⁴⁰ Brad Hambrick, “Conversations through 95 Theses – Defining ‘Psychology’ and ‘Secular Therapy,’” October 23, 2017, <http://bradhambrick.com/95theses3/>.

⁴¹ John Street, “Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 31-32.

⁴² Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” 8.

⁴³ 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁴⁴ 2 Peter 1:3.

about God in order to be saved, but I had to watch a few YouTube videos to renovate my kitchen. Unless I missed something in the temple descriptions in the last half of Exodus, the Bible is not sufficient to teach me how to hang drywall. The Bible is sufficient, but some things require more information. John Frame phrases this principle winsomely,

Scripture contains divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words that the plumber needs, and all the divine words that the theologian needs. So it is just as sufficient for plumbing as it is for theology. And in that sense it is sufficient for science and ethics as well.⁴⁵

Jeremy Pierre gives a fantastic description of just what Scripture is sufficient for: “Scripture is sufficient to frame the entirety of both human experience and the context in which that experience occurs according to God’s essential purpose for people to reflect His personhood by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ With this description of the sufficiency of Scripture, Pierre is stating that Scripture is absolutely sufficient for counseling, but he allows room for the biblical counselor to benefit from the research and findings of modern psychology by previously stating, “Because of the doctrines of the image of God and of common grace, we may generally rely on humankind’s ability to make accurate observations about reality, including our own psychological experience.”⁴⁷ Psychology and Scripture are not mutually exclusive, as long as the biblical counselor keeps the Scripture in the driving seat and allows the Bible to set the agenda. Psychology, as general revelation regarding the observations about the inner workings of the body and soul, can be helpful.

The Bible is not only sufficient, but it is authoritative over all of life. Scripture is not only authoritative on the specific things that it mentions, but it is authoritative over *all* of life. For example, Scripture never specifically mentions smoking marijuana, but

⁴⁵ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 49.

⁴⁶ Jeremy Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, but to Do What?,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

does that mean that one cannot draw principles from Scripture that give authoritative wisdom on if someone should or how much one should smoke? Pierre draws this distinction between “encyclopedic” authority and “emphatic” authority. Encyclopedic authority means that “on every topic that the Bible addresses, it does so with ultimate authority.” Most believers would be in agreement with encyclopedic authority, but in addition to encyclopedic authority there is emphatic authority which means, “whatever God draws our attention to as primary ought to capture our primary attention.” Because the Word of God is sufficient, all of creation is to be seen from a “God-ordained perspective.”⁴⁸ This means that when one is counseling, the primary framework that one should be working from is that of a biblical methodology. The job of the biblical counselor is to help the counselee to see their life as God sees it and to bring them back to right relationship with God.

The Helpfulness of Modern Psychology

The COMPIN framework argues that the words of the Bible contain “comprehensive internal resources” to provide the counselor everything he or she needs to help the counselee. While this is absolutely true, being informed of the clinical or psychological nature of problems can be exceedingly helpful. To be clinically-informed is to utilize the observed wisdom of the psychological or social sciences within the COMPIN framework in order to better point a counselee to Christ. The Bible must always take primacy. The Bible sets the agenda in the counseling room. The clinically-informed approach advocated for here is Bible-driven and gospel-centered but leaves room to utilize modern psychological research and observations to better conform the counselee to the image of Christ. Being clinically-informed can be helpful to the counselor, to the counselee, and to the public.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, but to Do What?,” 105.

Before discussing the helpfulness of psychology, it is necessary to state that not all psychology is helpful. “Psychology” comes in many different forms, and not all of them are equally beneficial for the biblical counselor. David Powlison documents at least six different meanings of “psychology,” and not all of the different forms of psychology are helpful or compatible with Christianity.⁴⁹ “Clinically-informed” biblical counseling does not adopt a secular worldview, but it is willing to glean insight from secular studies regarding human behavior and motivation. It is also willing to be provoked by secular techniques and observations. Biblical counselors will always be critical of a psychologized secular worldview because that worldview is incompatible with the Christian faith. But just because the worldview is wrong, it does not mean that every observation made by secular psychology is wrong. Many times, the modern literature about psychological disorders is still helpful for the biblical counselor to know and understand. As counselors use these different aspects of psychology, they must always carefully assess them through the lens of Scripture – rejecting whatever is false and utilizing whatever might be helpful.

The modern world is exceedingly psychologized. While believers must reject theories of human personality that compete with Scripture, that does not mean that those who come into the counseling office will not have unknowingly bought into other theories for themselves. To understand the counselee as well as possible is a noble goal. Being able to speak the language of modern psychology and psychotherapy is helpful for biblical counselors to relate to counselees and to interact with those whose professions are in mental health.

Understanding psychological terms and practices can be even more helpful for

⁴⁹ Those six different types of “psychologies” include: “how humans function,” “a detailed knowledge of human functioning,” “competing theories of human personality,” “practical applications to psychotherapy,” “a system of professional and institutional arrangements,” and “a mass ethos.” David A. Powlison, “A Biblical Counseling View,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 249-261.

the counselor, largely because these terms have entered the common vernacular of society. Mike Emlet maintains that “terms such as OCD, PTSD, and ADHD are part of our culture in formal and informal ways. So we can’t afford to keep our heads in the sand with a dismissive and isolationist posture.”⁵⁰ Emlet later goes on to explain four benefits of psychiatric diagnoses in ministry.

First, psychiatric diagnoses organize suffering into categories that prompt focused attention... Second, diagnoses remind us that this person’s experience is indeed different from mine... Third, certain diagnoses suggest particular patterns of severity and danger... Fourth, along these same lines, some diagnoses remind us of a more central role of the body in a person’s struggle.⁵¹

Personally and anecdotally, some clinical knowledge of psychiatric diagnoses has been helpful in my ministry. My undergraduate studies were in psychology, and, as a result, I am more than familiar with the DSM and the topics covered in university level psychology classes. A few years ago, I ministered to a young man who was experiencing nausea, sweating, chest pain, and heart palpitations whenever he was in confined spaces, especially while using public transit. His anxiety surrounding the prospect of being in one of these situations was oftentimes debilitating. My knowledge of psychological disorders allowed me to recognize this as a symptom cluster known as agoraphobia. This allowed me to research more about agoraphobia and what typical secular treatment plans look like for those who experience these symptoms. Over the course of several months, I built a positive discipleship relationship with this young man where we were able to seek the Lord’s help with his anxiety and fear. I spent a great deal of time teaching this man to pray, teaching him to rely upon the Lord, and teaching him of the love of God for him. After establishing a firm understanding of the Bible, I began to encourage him to slowly start putting himself into situations that would have previously been debilitating. We started with easier situations and gradually worked up to more panic-inducing contexts.

⁵⁰ Emlet, *Descriptions and Prescriptions*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 43-47.

This technique was highly related to the secular technique of “exposure therapy,” though it was distinct as I was teaching him how to depend upon the Lord while experiencing anxiety. This example displays how understanding a secular diagnoses within a biblical framework can be helpful, and how a secular technique can be used in a way that does not undermine or contradict the gospel.

While there are many benefits to psychiatric diagnoses, there are also pitfalls. Sometimes counselees can begin to see themselves as merely sick and not sinful. They can blame their sinful actions or attitudes upon their mental state or a chemical imbalance as opposed to their own sinful nature. While psychiatric struggles can make it harder for people to walk in the spirit, one cannot and should not blame the brain for sin. The body cannot cause someone to sin, instead our “minds are the initiators of all moral action.”⁵² The DSM never gives causes for psychiatric diagnoses, just common symptom groups; it is the job of the counselor to help the counselee who may have received a diagnosis to see what is truly at the heart of their issues. Sometimes psychiatric diagnoses can “abnormalize the normal through over-diagnosis.”⁵³ This means that people can start to view their situation as particularly traumatic or unique, thus they may have a more difficult time depending upon the Lord’s grace. Although these pitfalls are real, it does not help to simply tell the counselee to reject everything they have ever benefited from secular psychology. Instead, the biblical counselor should do their best to understand where the counselee is coming from and to deconstruct any unhelpful psychological construct while replacing it with a biblical construct.

Being clinically-informed as a biblical counselor in Boston, MA, is very helpful. Our city is highly medicalized and intellectual. A biblical counselor may not

⁵² Edward T. Welch, *Blame It on the Brain?: Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998).

⁵³ Emler, *Descriptions and Prescriptions*, 25.

necessarily borrow techniques from the world of secular psychology, but they may be provoked by those techniques. Biblical counselors need to be able to understand the language and help people to understand their diagnoses within a biblical framework without speaking in a way that is degrading or disregarding of the medical community. The approach is not without pitfalls, but it is important for counselors here to remember to be neither “too warm” nor “too cold” toward psychiatric diagnoses and medication.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This chapter sought to define and defend the core values of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling. Throughout the course of this chapter, I argued that the most affective counseling center to support a gospel city movement in Boston, MA, will be gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically-informed. These three core values define the type of counselors we hire and the type of care that we provide. The next chapter will discuss the implementation of this ministry project. The discussion will include the development and implementation of a training seminar to increase knowledge about biblical counseling to church congregants in Boston, MA.

⁵⁴ “Too warm” and “too cold” is also language that is borrowed from Emlet in Descriptions and Prescriptions.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to support the gospel city movement in Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among Christians in the area. Chapter 2 established the biblical foundations for biblical counseling. Chapter 3 defended the core values of affective biblical counseling in Boston, MA as gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically-informed. This chapter will describe the development and implementation of the “What is Biblical Counseling?” ministry project. From the outset, this project has had three goals. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of biblical counseling among pastors and congregants in our area. The second goal was to develop seminar curriculum that increases knowledge of biblical counseling practices and beliefs. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of local pastors and congregants in biblical counseling by using seminar curriculum. Overall, the project accomplished its purpose over the course of twenty-nine weeks.

Development and Evaluation of the Seminar (Weeks 1-25)

The development and evaluation of the seminar included three primary and overlapping steps. First, I organized and communicated the logistical details of the seminar. Then, I administered the Biblical Counseling Perceptions Survey as participants registered for the seminar. Finally, I developed the teaching material and plan for the seminar. I then submitted my teaching materials to an expert panel to evaluate the lessons, and I subsequently edited the curriculum. While this is the general order that I

followed in the preparation process, each of these steps also overlapped with one another in time.

The original timeline to develop the curriculum for this project spanned only ten weeks from February through May in 2020. The development and evaluation of the seminar material was seriously delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic. While I was on schedule to implement the project on May 8, 2020, the pandemic forced me to reschedule the seminar multiple times. As a result, the development and evaluation of the seminar sessions ended up spanning a period of twenty-five weeks.

Organizing and Communicating about the Seminar

This project's preparation period began by getting the logistical details for the seminar organized and communicated. In February, I secured the usage of Hope Fellowship Church in Cambridge, MA, to host the seminar on May 8. Then, I set up a registration website and I emailed the entire Boston Center for Biblical Counseling mailing list to advertise the seminar. Additionally, I personally emailed the pastors of each church that endorses the counseling center asking them to invite their congregations to the seminar.

In April, as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, I was forced to delay the seminar until August. At that time, I was still hopeful that the seminar would still be in-person at Hope Fellowship's church building. I communicated this to the current registrants and updated the online advertisements. In June, it became apparent that an in-person seminar would be near impossible due to the governmental restrictions on large gatherings and public sentiment regarding indoor gatherings. At that time, I shifted the seminar to a two-part online format. Again, I communicated this change to current registrants and then advertised the new format. Despite all of these changes, 119 people registered for the seminar.

Administering the Biblical Counseling Perceptions Survey

The Biblical Counseling Perceptions Survey (BCPS)¹ was distributed as part of the registration process for the seminar. Whenever one registered online, they were redirected to an online version of the BCPS. The BCPS consisted of two sections. The first seven questions were focused on demographics and sought to better understand the seminar participants. The second section of questions included twenty questions gauging common perceptions and misperceptions about biblical counseling.

All 119 registrants completed the survey as it was required for registration. Of those 119 registrants, 65 (54.6 percent) were women and 54 (45.4 percent) were men. The ages of the registrants ranged in age from 22 to 65 with a median age of 33. Virtually everyone who registered for the seminar identified as a Christian; there was just one exception. Similarly, almost everyone who participated in the pre-test indicated that they were members of a local church, with 111 (93.3 percent) indicating they were members while only eight (6.7 percent) indicating they were not. There were 24 (19.3 percent) who indicated that they were a pastor or elder at their respective churches, while an additional 34 (28.6 percent) marked that they were another type of leader at their respective churches. These two indicators taken together would show that 58 (48.7 percent) participants were active leaders in local churches. There were 12 (10.1 percent) participants who marked that they were mental health professionals.

The second section of the survey utilized a six-point Likert scale to assess the participant's perceptions of biblical counseling. Of those responding to the BCPS pre-test, 91 (76.5 percent) indicated that they had some level of a good understanding of what biblical counseling is "all about" while 28 (23.5 percent) indicated that they did not have a good understanding of what biblical counseling is "all about." At the same time, nearly everyone who registered for the seminar had a positive perception of biblical counseling.

¹ The BCPS is included in appendix 1.

Only five (4.2 percent) indicated any level of a negative perception of biblical counseling while the remaining 114 (95.8 percent) indicated that they had some level of a positive perspective regarding biblical counseling. These two questions revealed that the participants were generally seeking to increase their understanding rather than change their already formed opinions of biblical counseling.

Developing, Evaluating, and Editing the Seminar Curriculum

The initial information collected through the BCPS pre-surveys was helpful for the development of the seminar curriculum which was aimed at increasing knowledge about biblical counseling. When I first started developing the curriculum in February, I planned for small group activities such as brainstorming and case studies. As the COVID-19 global pandemic escalated throughout Spring 2020, I shifted the seminar to an online format, and I was forced to adjust my teaching to a lecture format. This also caused me to change the format for seminar from an all-day Saturday event to a two-part webinar taking place on two successive Monday nights. Overall, I was developing the curriculum from week 3 until week 22.

After developing my seminar curriculum, I submitted the material to an expert panel to review and evaluate the lessons. Three people comprised the expert panel used to review the curriculum. Alasdair Groves, the Executive Director for the Christian Counseling and Education foundation, served as the panelist with the most experience and the most feedback on the curriculum. Additionally, two local pastors also served on the expert panel. John Sullivan of Hope Fellowship Church in Cambridge, MA served on the panel. Mr. Sullivan holds a Master of Divinity from Westminster Seminary in the field of biblical counseling. Troy Albee of Grace Presbyterian Church in Hanover, MA also served on the panel. Dr. Albee holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Westminster Seminary in the field of biblical counseling.

These panelists reviewed the material during week 23 and independently

submitted their evaluations using the Biblical Counseling Seminar Curriculum Evaluation Tool² in week 24. The panel unanimously evaluated every aspect of the seminar curriculum as either “sufficient” or “exemplary” upon their first review, but each panelist still submitted suggestions to improve the teaching. After receiving the panelists’ feedback, I integrated their feedback into the curriculum during week 25 in order to make the material more cogent. This process of editing and improving the material was aided by phone calls to the panelists in order to better understand their feedback and guidance.

Implementation Period (Weeks 26-27)

The sessions were taught on two sequential Monday evenings on August 10 and August 17, 2020. Each session lasted approximately ninety minutes and were hosted on Zoom. The link for the sessions was emailed out a day before each session. The attendance for these sessions was high but hard to gauge with accuracy because the majority of participants did not turn on their screens during the teaching sessions. As a result, it is impossible to know how many people were watching from each device that logged into the Zoom meeting.

Session 1

Session 1 served to accomplish three objectives. First, I sought to introduce myself and the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling to the participants. Then, I gave a brief summary of the history of the biblical counseling movement. Finally, I gave the participants four key Bible passages that support biblical counseling. This was all done to increase the participants knowledge of biblical counseling, specifically showing how biblical counseling was developed and how it fits into the larger spectrum of counseling as a whole.

I started the session with a personal introduction. Of the 119 participants, I

² This tool can be found in appendix 2.

only recognized a handful of the registrants' names. The majority of the participants were people from other local churches who were unfamiliar with me and my teaching style. I sought to establish a connection with the participants by telling them about my family and my full-time job as a pastor at a local church. I also explained how the seminar was functioning as my doctor of ministry project and expressed my gratitude for their participation. Then I introduced them to the Boston Center of Biblical Counseling by explaining how the counseling center was founded in 2018 through a vision that was put together by my wife and me along with Alasdair and Lauren Groves of CCEF.

After the introduction, I did a short overview of the history of biblical counseling. Over the years, I have found the history of biblical counseling to be exceedingly helpful in understanding the movement as a whole and the different streams found within the movement. I started with a history of counseling in general, by explaining that counseling as a field is relatively new. I drew from my undergraduate studies as a Psychology major to explain about such figures as Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers and the contributions they made to modern counseling. Then I explained how Christians developed the "integration method" of counseling by attempting to marry modern psychology with Christianity. I taught that it was from this context that Jay Adams started the biblical counseling movement in 1970 with the publishing of *Competent to Counsel*. I then concluded this section of teaching by reviewing the work done since Adams started the movement through organizations such as CCEF and the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. Along the way, I drew out distinguishing characteristics about each organization to help the participants more fully grasp the wide range of opinions and emphases among the different streams of biblical counseling.

Finally, I ended session 1 with a review of four key Bible passages that support biblical counseling. These four bible passages are the four that were covered in chapter 2 of this project. By explaining these Bible passages, my hope was to instill confidence in biblical counselling as the normal way that God's people are called to care for one

another described in the Bible. I also sought to answer misperceptions regarding biblical counseling. I used 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 to address the misperception that “Bible counseling solely focuses on correcting sin.” This passage explains that God’s people are not only to admonish one another, but they are also called to comfort one another. I used Galatians 6:2 to address the misconception that “counseling is only for professionals.” This passage explains that all Christians are called to bear one another’s burdens as this is how we fulfill the law of Christ. I used 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to correct the misconception that “biblical counseling uses a one-size-fits-all wooden approach.” This passage emphasizes that different people need different approaches depending upon their personal context. Finally, I showed how Ephesians 4:11-12 makes pastors responsible for equipping the entire body of Christ to do the work of caring for souls with the gospel.

I ended session 1 by defining biblical counseling and distributing two resources for further reading. As I have stated previously in this project, I define biblical counseling as “a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another’s unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The two additional resources that I made available for the participants were David Powlison’s “The Cure of Souls (and Modern Psychotherapies)” and Tim Keller’s “4 Models of Counseling in Pastoral Ministry.” After distributing these materials, I pleaded for my participants to return next week and ended in prayer.

Session 2

Session 2 occurred exactly one week after session 1 occurred. As expected with any two-part online seminar, the attendance for session 2 was not as strong as session 1, but a majority of the registered participants still logged onto the seminar. The exact number of participants for each seminar is difficult to know as most participants did not turn on their cameras during the sessions and many of the windows almost certainly had multiple participants.

While session 1 sought to define biblical counseling by helping the participants to understand how it fits into the landscape of counseling in general, session 2 sought to build upon that definition further by presenting a vision for healthy biblical counseling that can support a gospel city movement. The session explored what it means to be gospel-center, church-based, and clinically-informed. By exploring each of these core-values for the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling, I was able to defend how we do biblical counseling while also demonstrating the spectrum of different beliefs found within the biblical counseling movement.

Session 2 started quickly as there was a great deal of material to cover. I began with a quick overview of the session 1 and emphasized my definition of biblical counseling as “a helping relationship where one seeks to understand another’s unique struggles and then encourages them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.” After this brief introduction, I jumped right into the material on “gospel-centered.” I argued that “biblical counseling must be gospel-centered because the gospel is at the center of the message of the bible.” In order to help the participants understand what it means to be gospel-centered, I explained what it means to have a gospel-centered hermeneutic and gospel-centered application. I taught that a gospel-centered hermeneutic must see the overarching story of God’s redeeming work throughout all of Scripture, including the Old Testament. Without this sort of hermeneutic, biblical counseling can easily regress into moralism. A gospel-centered hermeneutic is required for biblical counseling because counseling cannot truly be biblical if the Bible is not properly interpreted. I then briefly illustrated how to take that redeeming story of God found in the Bible and apply it to anyone’s ordinary life. I ended this section by emphasizes that biblical counseling is the only method of counseling where the primary goal is nothing other than to glorify God through worship.

Then I turned to explaining what it means to be church-based. In this section, I cast a vision for the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling to foster a culture of care

throughout Greater Boston. This vision is too larger for any one counseling center to accomplish, and so I argued that “the only hope for biblical counseling to support a gospel city movement is for it to be church-based.” I explained to the participants that the line between biblical counseling and discipleship is so thin that it is hard to distinguish the two from one another at times. In fact, biblical counseling could be described as intensive discipleship. If biblical counseling is discipleship, then the church is the absolute best place for biblical counseling to be taking place. After establishing this line of reasoning, I then turned my attention to defending parachurch counseling centers as a valid and God-glorifying way to practice biblical counseling. I finished by giving four examples of how the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling seeks to come alongside local church to help them foster a culture of care: collaborative care of counselees with local pastors, equipping local church members to care for one another, consulting with pastors on difficult cases, and by ministering to the ministers.

After establishing biblical counseling as gospel-centered and church-based, I then argued that biblical counseling should be clinically-informed. Since establishing the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling in 2018, this has been the most controversial of our core values. I have received more questions regarding this core value than the other two values combined. My goal with this section was to explain a method of counseling that is completely committed to what David Powlison calls COMPIN, while also benefiting from secular psychological resource through being clinically-informed.³ In my lesson on being clinically-informed, I argued for the sufficiency and primacy of the Bible and the helpfulness of modern psychology. My goal was to help our participants to become increasingly committed to biblical counseling methods and goals, but with a willingness to be provoked in their thinking by secular theories and techniques.

³ COMPIN has been described previously in this project, but a full description can be found in Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” 17.

I closed session 2 by sending all the participants the post-survey and asking them to fill it out before logging off. While they were filling out the survey, I opened up the floor to questions. I fielded four or five questions before wrapping up the session with a prayer. I gave all the participants my contact information so that they could get in touch with me for further questions.

Follow-Up Period (Weeks 28-29)

The primary goal of the follow-up period was to promote the post-survey to seminar participants and then to run the t-test for dependent samples. After completing the seminar, I connected with the participants multiple times reminding them to complete the post-survey if they did not get a chance to do so after the seminar. Although there were more participants on the online seminar for each seminar, there were only fifty-five participants who completed the post-BCPS. Unfortunately, only thirty-six of those fifty-five submissions had a pre-survey submission with a matching four-digit code. In week 29, I ran a t-test for dependent samples on these thirty-six submissions and analyzed the data.

Conclusion

This project was implemented over three periods: the preparation period, the implementation period, and the follow-up period. During the preparation period, I organized the seminar logistics and wrote the seminar curriculum. This seminar curriculum was distributed to an expert panel to be reviewed. The implementation period consisted of a two-week online seminar to teach the seminar curriculum. The follow-up period consisted of collecting post-survey responses and analyzing the data by utilizing a t-test for dependent samples. The following final chapter will provide an extensive description and evaluation of the results of this project.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

I started this project when the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling was merely an idea in my head, and today it is a healthy and growing non-profit counseling and equipping center with five staff members. This project contributed substantially to our vision of cultivating a culture of care throughout the Greater Boston region. The work of this project has exceeded the stated purpose of developing a seminar curriculum in order to increase knowledge about biblical counseling in Boston. As a result of the work done for this project, the vision for the philosophy of care at Boston Center for Biblical Counseling has been solidified and the biblical counseling movement in Boston is stronger now than ever before.

The previous chapter described the implementation of this project, including the preparation and teaching of the seminar curriculum. This chapter will explore the overall effectiveness of the project. First, the overall purpose of the project will be evaluated. Then each of the three goals of the project will be evaluated. Then I will document several strengths and weaknesses of the project. Finally, the chapter will conclude with theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to support the gospel city movement in Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among Christians in the area. Not only were the three goals accomplished (see below), but there seems to be a real biblical counseling movement going on in our city. The full effect of this project's

purpose is difficult to quantitatively measure, but it is clear to those who are familiar with the gospel ecosystem in Boston. Through the work of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling and this project, a number of churches in the area have spoken about biblical counseling to their congregations for the first time. Just three years ago, many local churches had no stance on what model of counseling they supported. Even if congregants did not attend the seminar, many of them have been exposed to “biblical counseling” as an idea for the first time just through local churches advertising this project. As opposed to just a few years ago, now there are over two dozen churches who explicitly endorse biblical counseling and speak regularly about biblical counseling events and opportunities to their congregants.

On an anecdotal level, the work of this project has inspired a number of local Christians to pursue further education in biblical counseling. After the seminar, there were three participants who reached out to me to discuss quitting their jobs to pursue a career in biblical counseling. Each of these participants have started a master’s degree program in biblical counseling and are working toward starting internships with the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling. These are just the participants who expressly reached out to me for guidance following the seminar. I have heard from a number of pastors in the area who have had similar conversations with members of their churches about pursuing biblical counseling education professionally or just to support the work of the local church.

Since we started the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling our vision has been to foster a culture of care throughout the Greater Boston region through equipping resources and counseling services. The work of this project has stimulated and invigorated that vision to a level that I could not have imagined. God is accomplishing the vision for the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling, and everything he has done is greater than what I could have accomplished. Suffice to say, this project accomplished its purpose, and then some.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Three goals were specified from the onset of this project: to assess the current understanding of biblical counseling among pastors and congregants in our area, to develop seminar curriculum that increases knowledge of biblical counseling practices and beliefs, and to increase the knowledge of local pastors and congregants in biblical counseling by using seminar curriculum. Each of these goals will be evaluated below.

Assess Understanding

The first goal was to assess the understanding of biblical counseling among pastors and congregants in our area. In order to assess this understand, I created the BCPS¹ which asked questions meant to target common perceptions and misperceptions about biblical counseling. The goal was successfully met when 119 participants completed the BCPS. Table 1 shows the details of the average scores from all 119 participants per question on a six-point Likert scale.

¹ The BCPS can be found in its entirety in appendix 1.

Table 1. Pre-BCPS average scores per question

<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1	4.2
2	5
3	3.5
4	5
5	4.4
6	5
7	4.6
8	4.1
9	3.5
10	3.7
11	4.4
12	4.2
13	4.5
14	4.6
15	3.8
16	3.8
17	3.5
18	4.4
19	5.2
20	4.9

Given the information collected by the pre-BCPS, I gathered at least one important observation that influenced my seminar preparation. The participants rated their opinion of biblical counseling higher than they rated their own understanding of biblical counseling. Question 1 asked, “I have a good understanding of what ‘biblical counseling’ is all about,” while question 2 asked, “I have a positive perception of biblical counseling.” The average score for question 2 was a 5 on the Likert scale while the average score for question 1 was merely a 4.2. This observation was different than what I initially assumed. When I set out to execute this project, I thought that I would be fighting against misperceptions and negative opinions about biblical counseling. Instead, I observed that biblical counseling has a higher reputation than understanding level

among the participants. This is probably because those who would be willing to participate in a two-part biblical counseling seminar are probably those who already have a positive perception of the content but want to increase their knowledge.

The rest of the survey served to emphasize this important observation. Questions related to pre-existing perceptions regarding biblical counseling were consistently rated higher, while questions which required more knowledge about biblical counseling were consistently rated lower. For example, question 19 asks, “I think the Bible addresses serious personal problems in a way not addressed by secular psychology.” Out of the twenty questions, this question received the highest average rating. This illustrates that people have a high trust in the Bible and its applicability to their lives. On the other hand, question 15 received one of the lowest ratings. It asks the participants opinion on the statement, “Anxiety and depression are problems that are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.” This is a more complicated question regarding the relationship between the Bible and human physiology, and the participants were less confident in their answer. Overall, the goal of assessing understanding regarding biblical counseling in our area was deemed successful when over twenty-five participants completed the pre-BCPS. This survey yielded a helpful picture of knowledge and perceptions regarding biblical counseling.

Develop Seminar

The second goal was to develop seminar curriculum that increases knowledge of biblical counseling practices and beliefs. The goal was successfully met when it was evaluated by an expert panel and when a minimum of ninety percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.² Table 2 below shows the summary of the scores on each criterion from each member of the panel.

² The rubric used for evaluating the curriculum can be found in its entirety in appendix 2.

Table 2. Summary of scores for each criteria

<i>Evaluator</i>	<i>Criteria 1</i>	<i>Criteria 2</i>	<i>Criteria 3</i>	<i>Criteria 4</i>	<i>Criteria 5</i>	<i>Criteria 6</i>	<i>Criteria 7</i>
Alasdair Groves	4	3	4	3	4	3	4
Troy Albee	4	4	4	4	3	3	4
John Sullivan	4	4	4	3	4	4	4
Average	4	3.67	4	3.33	3.67	3.33	4

As this table displays, all of the evaluation criteria was judged by the expert panel to rate a value of 3 (sufficient) or 4 (exemplary). Therefore, this goal was sufficiently met with twenty-nine percent marked as sufficient and seventy-one percent marked as exemplary. In addition to each these marks, each evaluator took the time to offer me personal encouragements and advice on how to improve the material. While each evaluator assessed the material to meet or exceed the criteria on the initial evaluation, I greatly benefited from their feedback through emails and phone calls. This feedback helped me to revise the curriculum to better faithfully represent biblical counseling to the seminar participants.

Increase Knowledge

The third goal of the project was to increase knowledge of biblical counseling foundations and methodology through teaching the developed curriculum in a seminar. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the seminars were taught as a two-part webinar on successive Monday evenings as opposed to an in-person training with breakouts and group discussions. The goal was measured by distributing the BCPS again to those who completed the seminar material. The goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores: $t_{(36)} = -3.507, p = .0006$. This data is shown in the table below.³

³ Full details regarding t-test results may be found in appendix 3.

Table 3. T-test Analysis

	<i>Pre-test Total</i>	<i>Post-test Total</i>
Mean	120.388889	123.583333
Variance	128.244444	118.25
Observations	36	36
Pearson Correlation	0.87952217	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	35	
t Stat	-3.5066284	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00063269	
t Critical one-tail	1.68957246	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00126538	
t Critical two-tail	2.03010793	

Of the 119 participants who completed the pre-BCPS and registered for the event, only fifty-five completed the post-BCPS. Of those fifty-five registered participants, nineteen submitted a different four-digit code for identification than they submitted for the pre-BCPS. While there were more than fifty-five participants at the seminar, I was left with only thirty-six post-BCPS submissions to compare to matched pre-BCPS submissions. Although this was disappointing, this was still enough data to substantiate significant results. The table below displays the average score for each survey question for the pre- and post-tests and the difference between those scores. Question 1 was the summary question for the entire survey and revealed the most significant change. This displayed that the participants on average felt more informed about biblical counseling after the seminar than before the seminar, which was the overall goal of the seminar! The other questions were directed at more specific attitudes and opinions about biblical counseling and yielded less significant change in score.

Table 4. Pre- and post-BCPS results by question

<i>Question</i>	<i>Pre-BCPS</i>	<i>Post-BCPS</i>	<i>Difference</i>
1	4.0	5.1	1.1
2	5.0	5.2	0.2
3	3.1	4.0	0.9
4	5.0	5.4	0.4
5	4.4	3.9	-0.4
6	4.8	5.1	0.3
7	4.4	4.8	0.4
8	4.1	4.4	0.3
9	3.4	3.5	0.1
10	3.8	3.3	-0.4
11	4.5	4.3	-0.2
12	4.1	4.3	0.3
13	4.5	4.7	0.2
14	4.8	4.6	-0.2
15	4.1	3.8	-0.3
16	3.6	3.6	0.0
17	3.6	3.1	-0.5
18	4.1	4.5	0.3
19	5.1	5.3	0.2
20	4.7	5.0	0.3

Strengths of the Project

Numerous strengths of the project are discernable. First, it exposed and increased a passion for biblical counseling in our area. To my knowledge, no biblical counseling center has existed in the Greater Boston region until we started the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling in connection with this project. The interest level for this seminar was outstanding and surprising. When preparing for the seminar, I was only expecting twenty-five or maybe fifty participants. To have 119 participants register for the seminar exceeded all my expectations. This reveals a true hunger for biblical counseling in our area.

In addition to this high level of interest, the pre- and post-surveys revealed a much higher initial perception of biblical counseling than I expected. When I set out to

complete this project, I assumed that there would be a certain level of hostility toward biblical counseling among the participants. This assumption was based on the lack of biblical counseling exposure in the area along with the strong integrationist approach to the dominant theological training institution of the area, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The results of this project delightfully proved that assumption to be incorrect. The biblical counseling movement enjoys a very positive reputation in this area, at least among those who registered for this seminar.

Because the initial perceptions of biblical counseling were stronger than I first assumed, the results of the seminar spurred a far greater level of passion for biblical counseling than I expected. When I initially set out to complete this project, my hope was to get my participants to move from negative perceptions to neutral or slightly positive perceptions of biblical counseling. Instead, the results showed that the participants moved from positive perceptions about biblical counseling to even more positive perceptions about biblical counseling. The seminar helped support a what appears to be a movement of strong interest and passion for biblical counseling in our area.

Another strength to be celebrated is the multi-church cooperation displayed in the support of this seminar. This seminar was advertised in a number of local churches, all seeking to better foster a culture of biblical counseling in their congregational bodies. In a world where pastors are far too often concerned only about building up their own church numbers, true multi-church collaboration such as this should be commended. If I had done this project merely within the context of the local church where I pastor, I would have known most of the participants and the impact would have been limited. Because this was done through the counseling center, I knew very few of the participants, and the exposure for biblical counseling across the city was greater.

While the teaching context was certainly far less than ideal (I will discuss this in the next section), there were some strengths connected to doing the seminar online. First, it caused me to reduce the material to the most necessary aspects in order to better

communicate online. Teaching over an online platform is far more difficult than teaching in person, but it motivated me to be more concise in my pedagogical methods. In addition to this, I am confident that more people participated in the seminar as a result of it being hosted online than would have participated if it were in-person. The online nature of the seminar set the bar for participation at a low level. This allowed for a greater exposure than what I would have had otherwise.

Finally, this project revealed a need for further work to be done specifically in the training of biblical counselors in our area. The purpose of this project was not to equip biblical counselors, but merely to increase knowledge about biblical counseling. This project revealed an intense level of interest in going deeper to understand biblical counseling among many people in our area. Now that they know what it is, I believe that many of these participants would be willing and eager to engage in a greater degree of training to learn how to actually practice biblical counseling.

Weaknesses and Improvements of the Project

Several weaknesses limited the impact of this seminar. First and foremost, my teaching plan was drastically modified due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Since I started working on this project, I planned for the capstone seminar to occur in May 2020. In March 2020, the entire world was forced to shut down. The COVID-19 crisis was particularly acute in the Boston area. Our city was one of the first and hardest hit areas of the country. The Boston area responded with sweeping public health regulations to control the spread of the virus. One of these regulations included the restriction of any public gathering. Some form of these regulations is still in place as of the writing of this chapter in October 2020. While churches are allowed to meet up to 40% building capacity, public gatherings of any sort are restricted to less than 50, but the general population of the area still tends to avoid this sort of gathering.

Because of these public health regulations, I was forced to adjust the seminar to a virtual format. The material would have been communicated much more clearly through an in-person training, but this was not a valid option in our area. With the shift to virtual format, many of my teaching techniques had to change. Had we met in person, I would have facilitated many group discussions and broken the participants into small groups to brainstorm and discuss questions related to biblical counseling. With the online format, I decided that a lecture format would be preferable to attempting to facilitate virtual small groups with people who did not know one another. Had we met in-person, the entire training would have taken place in one day. With the online format, I decided the material would best be presented over the two successive Monday evenings due to limited attention spans while online. As a result of this change, the second Monday evening meeting was more sparsely attended. In addition to these changes, communicating over digital platform is far more challenging than teaching in person.

These changes certainly limited the effectiveness of my project. One thing I would do to improve the project would be to execute the original plan of a one-day seminar, in-person, with small groups and crowd participation. In fact, I am considering teaching this seminar material again to an in-person group once the pandemic is over, just to further the work of the counseling center. I have already had some interested parties reach out asking if the material was recorded. This would allow some participants to potentially hear the curriculum a second time, but it would also draw some new participants to hear the material.

The second major weakness with this project was the BCPS. When I crafted the survey, I did not properly take into consideration what I was trying to measure with each question. I formed the survey before writing all the training material, but then I did not even cover all the things that the survey asked about. As I rewrote the training curriculum for the shorter virtual training, I was forced to narrow my focus to the primary goal. The primary goal was to increase knowledge about biblical counseling, and I did

not have enough time to cover important peripheral topics. Some of the questions that I thought would be important when I first wrote the survey ended up being peripheral to my actual central focus for training. I had big aspirations for the training when I wrote the BCPS. As a result, I included detailed questions about psychiatric disorders, counseling licensure, and psychiatric medication. While all the questions were tangentially connected to the training material, they were too broad and ambitious in nature. I should have written all the questions to focus more on the essential nature of biblical counseling.

For example, the first question on the survey received the most significant improvement between the pre-BCPS and post-BCPS. This question simply stated, “I have a good understanding of what ‘Biblical Counseling’ is all about.” This had an average rating of 4.0 in the pre-BCPS and an average rating of 5.1 in the post-BCPS. This question was the true focus of my project, and the change in score revealed the success of the project. One way that I could have improved upon the project would have been to better craft the survey questions to match my actual pedagogical intentions. I am fairly certain that my results would have been stronger if I had asked for responses to statements such as, “I believe it is important for biblical counseling to be clinically informed,” or “Biblical counseling must utilize a proper gospel-centered hermeneutic,” or “Worship is the ultimate goal of counseling.”

Lastly, the results would have been much stronger had I had more post-surveys with matching identification numbers to pre-surveys. Although I had over 119 registered participants, and over sixty-five at each session, I only had fifty-five total post-BCPS submissions. Of those fifty-five post-BCPS submissions, I had to throw out nineteen of the results because they did not have corresponding pre-BCPS submissions. I suspect that most of these post-BCPS submissions lacked a matching pre-BCPS submission because the participants forgot what number they had previously used. This is understandable because the survey simply asked them to designate a “4-digit identification code” without much instruction on how to create that code. My results could have been stronger had I

told the participants to simply use the last four digits of their phone number.

Theological Reflections

This project helped me to become more confident the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture than ever before. There are thousands of professional licensed counselors throughout the Boston area, but God has given many believers in our area a hunger for biblical counseling. I believe that this is because God has given his people a hunger for the Word of God. The voice of the Lord is powerful, and it is what God's people need for the care and cure of their souls. The voice of the Lord is often equated with the work of the Lord himself. Psalm 29:5 states, "The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon." This verse displays that when the voice of the Lord does something, it is the Lord moving. All believers should seek to hear the voice of the Lord so that the Lord himself might move in their lives. The work of biblical counseling is to open the Word of God and allow the voice of the Lord through his written word to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

I was also reminded of the role of the pastor in the local church to shepherd his flock. This seminar lasted just a couple of hours over two August evenings in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. If we want to see a biblical counseling movement in Boston, the pastors of local churches are going to have to champion that effort. I was grateful to see several pastors register for the seminar and attend each session. As a pastor of a local church, I was challenged to continue to develop myself to better care for the souls entrusted to my care. Developing the seminar curriculum helped me to realize the prime placement of the church in the work of the care of souls. My prayer is that pastors of local bodies of Christ might rise up to the occasion to care for one another with the gospel.

Lastly, I was challenged to continue studying the complexity of the human heart. When I first started this project, I felt like I had a good understanding of human

motivation and how people change. The more I looked at the nature of biblical counseling, the more I felt daunted by the sheer complexity of the human heart. This was particularly challenging as I wrote the “gospel-centered” section of chapter 3. My temptation was to merely say, “The gospel is the solution to all of our problems,” but the application of the gospel to complex human hearts is exceedingly challenging!

All humans are complicated bundles of desires and fears, obsessions and compulsions, hurts and sorrows. The human heart is complicated because humans were made in the image of God, whose complexity is beyond imagination. Yet, at the same time, 1 Corinthians 10:13 states that “no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.” While the heart is complex, the complexity comes through unique combinations of common struggles. I have learned that I must become a better listener so that I can discern the common struggles from which people suffer. Many times, people are suffering from a mixture of different results of the fall such as loneliness, hurt, shame, or guilt. People are often not personally aware of all the ways in which they are suffering. I must become an even better student of the Word of God so that I can appropriately apply helpful aspects of the gospel to each person’s unique, yet common, struggles. For example, when helping someone who suffers from some form of obsessive-compulsive behavior, I must grow in my ability to listen and help them see how they are suffering from temptations that are common to all people, even though their issues might be unique. I then must learn what aspects of the character of God and the Word of God best help someone suffering from that unique mixture of common struggles.

While I must become a better listener to apply the gospel, the truth of the gospel has become more and more simple to me throughout the course of this project. The message of Jesus is so simple that a four-year-old child can grasp it, and so complicated that there will never be enough doctorate projects written to explore the full depths. This gospel message is perfectly designed to apply to our complicated hearts made in the image of God.

Personal Reflections

I never intended to lead a biblical counseling center. When my wife and I moved to Boston in 2012, it was to serve as an Executive Pastor at a local church plant. When we had the idea to start a biblical counseling center in 2015, I had no idea I would run the center, nor complete this doctoral program. When I started the doctoral program in 2017, the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling was still just an idea in my head. I had started to get the gears turning to launch, but we still had no money, no counselees, no location, no bylaws, no board members, and no staff. While I continued to work on this project, we watched the counseling center blossom. Today, the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling has two counselors with full caseloads, a part-time biblical psychiatrist, and it is about to start an intern program. Each month, well over 100 different counselees receive care through our ministry. God has truly done an amazing work through the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling.

While I am proud of all the growth that our little counseling center has experienced over the past three years, I know that it is time for me to step out of the Executive Director role with the organization. As I conclude the work of this doctoral program, I have a strong sense that the work of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling has simply exceeded my ability to lead. This has been a difficult realization for me. Personally, I would prefer to continue to run the counseling center and to pastor the church at the same time, but God has used this project to help me to see my limits. I simply do not have the margin to run the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling, to pastor my church, and to lead my growing family in a way that would glorify God. Over the past few years, there have been multiple occasions where I have felt just completely overwhelmed with the amount of responsibility that I carry each day.

This overblown sense of responsibility and reluctance to give away any of the ministries the Lord has given me stems from my own pride. I want to continue to run the counseling center and pastor the church because I believe that I am the only one who can

do it properly. What a prideful man I am! These ministries belong to the Lord, and he is able to raise up more leaders to fill these roles at any time that he desires. I must follow the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2 when he says, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” I must entrust the ministry of God to other faithful men and women who can help carry the ministry forward. My greatest desire is to see a movement of God in our city, and that movement must extend beyond what I, personally, am able to accomplish.

As I entrust this ministry to other faithful men and women to carry the torch, I have also been encouraged to entrust the ministry to God himself. The past few years have taught me to have less confidence in my own ability and to have a greater dependence upon his grace and kindness. Now, more than ever, I have been encouraged by the heart of Christ for me, a sinner.

I am committed to seeing the counseling center thrive, and I believe that I must hand over the Executive Director role to someone with more actual counseling experience in order for it to continue to flourish. I feel as though every bit of growth that the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling has been in spite of me. I am more committed than ever to the ministry of the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling and look forward to supporting their work for many years as an involved and invested local pastor.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to support the gospel city movement of Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among Christians in the area. The project has been successful, although there is still a great deal of work to be done. There is further work to be done in support of biblical counseling in Boston. We are still in the infancy stages of biblical counseling in our city. I hope that over the next five to ten years I get to witness the Boston Center for Biblical Counseling continue to grow in both counseling services and equipping resources. I pray that local

churches will grasp the vision for biblical counseling and equip their church members to care for one another with the good news of Jesus.

There is also a great deal of further work to be done to support the gospel city movement in Boston. Biblical counseling is just one aspect of the “gospel ecosystem” that is required for that vision of a gospel city movement to take root. My hope is that this project will inspire other pastors and leaders in this generation and the next to ambitiously work to see the gospel ecosystem be established in Boston. I pray that the Holy Spirit might choose to do a great thing in our time in our city, and that all this work is just laying the foundation for that fresh outpouring of the Spirit.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLICAL COUNSELING PERCEPTIONS SURVEY (BCPS)

Agreement to Participate

The Boston Center for Biblical Counseling is committed to fostering a culture of care throughout Greater Boston through counseling services and equipping resources that are gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically-informed. It is our strong belief that a movement of God in our city will be greatly helped by informing local Christians about the basics of biblical counseling foundations and practices.

This assessment is designed to measure your current understanding of biblical counseling. It is being administered by Fletcher Lang for the purpose of collecting data for a doctoral ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project. Those who complete this survey will be invited to participate in a half-day seminar on the basics of biblical counseling and gospel movement dynamics.

Date: _____

Please designate a four-digit ID number: _____
(usually last 4 numbers of SSN or phone number)

Age: _____ Gender: _____

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|
| 1. | I consider myself to be a Christian (circle one): | yes | no |
| 2. | I am a member of a local church: | yes | no |
| 3. | I am an elder/pastor of a local church: | yes | no |
| 4. | I am another type of leader in a local church: | yes | no |

5. I am a mental health professional: yes no

For the following questions, please "X" the description that best represents your level of agreement/disagreement.

SD = Strongly Disagree
 D = Disagree
 DS = Disagree Somewhat
 AS = Agree Somewhat
 A = Agree
 SA = Strongly Agree

1. I have a good understanding of what "Biblical Counseling" is all about.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. I have a positive perception of biblical counseling.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. Biblical counseling is just another way of saying "Christian counseling."	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. Biblical counseling focuses primarily on behavior and not the heart motivation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. Sin is the ultimate cause for all personal problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. The phrase "Let go and let God" summarizes what biblical counseling is all about.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. Biblical counselors are generally more harsh than secular counselors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I feel confident going to my pastor with my own significant personal problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. If approached by a friend from church struggling with anger or sexual temptation, I would first encourage him or her to talk with a pastor or professional counselor.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. If approached by a friend from church struggling with anxiety or depression, I would first encourage him or her to talk to a professional counselor.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. If approached by a friend from church suffering from a mental disorder such as ADHD or bipolar disorder, I would first encourage him or her to talk to a professional counselor.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. Someone who has not formally studied counseling can help me with my significant personal problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. Church leaders are responsible for equipping their members to counsel one another.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

14. I believe that biblical counseling and psychology are compatible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. Anxiety and depression are problems that are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. If I had a serious personal problem, I would first seek help from a professional counselor.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I would be willing to go to a non-Christian counselor to help me with serious personal problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. Good counseling is only done by licensed professionals.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I think the Bible addresses serious personal problems in ways not addressed by secular psychology.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. Biblical counselors are against medication.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Please list or comment about any other perceptions or opinions you may hold regarding biblical counseling:

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Biblical Counseling Seminar Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson One Evaluation					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issues of biblical counselling ministry.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on counseling.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The material displays a strong understanding of human nature.					
The lesson contains points of practical importance.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A1. Pre- and post-BCPS results

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Pre-BCPS</i>	<i>Post-BCPS</i>	<i>Difference</i>
1	131	134	3
2	113	118	5
3	127	130	3
4	118	117	-1
5	107	109	2
6	96	98	2
7	119	128	9
8	104	107	3
9	107	114	7
10	133	138	5
11	125	122	-3
12	117	126	9
13	114	125	11
14	124	136	12
15	137	133	-4
16	109	118	9
17	108	121	13
18	126	132	6
19	113	116	3
20	130	126	-4
21	102	105	3
22	123	125	2
23	121	120	-1
24	127	124	-3
25	127	131	4
26	138	138	0
27	131	122	-9
28	135	139	4
29	125	120	-5

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Pre-BCPS</i>	<i>Post-BCPS</i>	<i>Difference</i>
30	116	110	-6
31	118	118	0
32	113	116	3
33	134	141	7
34	107	119	12
35	143	147	4
36	116	126	10

Table A2. T-test analysis

	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	120.388889	123.583333
Variance	128.244444	118.25
Observations	36	36
Pearson Correlation	0.87952217	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	35	
t Stat	-3.5066284	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00063269	
t Critical one-tail	1.68957246	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00126538	
t Critical two-tail	2.03010793	

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING TO SUPPORT A GOSPEL CITY MOVEMENT IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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The purpose of this project was to support the gospel city movement of Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among Christians in the area. Chapter 1 presents the context, rationale, and goals of this project. Chapter 2 seeks to demonstrate the biblical rationale for biblical counseling through the exegesis of four passages (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Ephesians 4:11-12, and Galatians 6:2). Chapter 3 demonstrates how a gospel city movement will best be supported by a culture of biblical counseling that is gospel-centered, church-based, and clinically-informed. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. Overall, the purpose of this project was to serve the movement of God in Boston, Massachusetts by increasing knowledge about biblical counseling among church members and leaders.

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