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READING THE GOSPELS WELL TO COUNSEL PEOPLE
WELL: HERMENEUTICS, BIBLICAL COUNSELING,
AND THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A Thesis
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

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This project is dedicated in memory of Pastor Richard “Rick” E. Bowden (1967-2018),
who demonstrated passion for Jesus that was an example for me at just the right time,
and who encouraged this pastor-to-be to prioritize reading the Gospels
in order to “stick close to Jesus.”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	Danker, Frederick, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BST	Bible Speaks Today
BTCB	Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible
CCBC	<i>Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth</i> . Edited by James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Steve Viars. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013.
CHCB	<i>Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically</i> . Edited by John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBC	<i>Journal of Biblical Counseling</i>
LN	Louw, Johannes. P., and Eugene A Nida. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989, Logos Bible Software.
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SC	<i>Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World</i> . Edited by Robert W. Kellemen and Jeff Forrey. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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PREFACE

My introduction to biblical counseling came through the writings of David Powlison and Paul Tripp during my MDiv studies at Southern. By later reading *How People Change* and other works, my familiarity increased out of a desire to grow in applying Scripture to my own life and ministry. Around that time, a friendship developed with a church planter new to central Ohio, a friendship that has borne fruit, fish, and a few spreadsheets. Rush Witt invited me to attend the annual conference of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) on Southern's campus. During that conference and despite our red lanyards, my appreciation lurched ahead for how conference speakers faithfully and substantively applied God's Word concretely to life's concerns. What I was absorbing began to influence every area of my pastoral ministry. As I considered additional studies and saw the significance of biblical counseling for ministry practice, deciding on a concentration was easier than choosing which piece of pie to enjoy at the Homemade Ice Cream and Pie Kitchen each time I ventured to Louisville. At the completion of the program of study, what I anticipated has proven true—both for the studies and the pie. Rush, I owe you and Kevin a scoop and a slice.

The completion of a task such as this project occasions a unique opportunity for reflection and gratitude. Undoubtedly, I regrettably will neglect to thank some that I should. Educationally, I am the product of multiple influences. I am especially grateful to engineering professors such as Drs. Richard Bennett, Matthew Mauldon, Timothy Whalen, and Garrett Jeong, who each took a unique and personal interest in my education. Gratitude also goes to President R. Albert Mohler and the faculty and staff of SBTS between the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2008—especially Drs. Robert Plummer

and Stephen Wellum—for their biblically saturated instruction which was crucial to my biblical and theological development.

Thanks also goes to my DMin seminar professors—Drs. Robert Jones, Jeremy Pierre, and Stuart Scott—for their faithful instruction. I am especially grateful to Dr. Jones for agreeing to serve as my advisor, for his patience as I sought to get my bearings in the early stages of this project, and for his feedback, encouragement, and support as the project pushed towards the finish line. Moreover, the opportunity Dr. Jones afforded me to serve as his Garrett Fellow proved invaluable for solidifying and advancing my understanding and appreciation of the three trees/six-box model for counseling. I am also grateful to Dr. Jonathan Pennington, both for serving as the second reader on this project and for his class on the exegesis of Matthew during my MDiv studies. In no small way, this project stems from that course. To my DMin classmates—especially Glenn Dunn, Andy Miller, Matt Silva, and Sybrand de Swardt—your comradery, stories, jokes, and prayers were an unexpected gift. Thanks also goes to both the staff in the office of Professional Doctoral Studies and the Writing Center staff for patiently and consistently answering multiple email enquiries throughout this process.

The project has been dedicated in memory of Pastor Rick Bowden, pastor for over twenty years of Ormsby Heights Baptist Church in Louisville. Rick, along with my dad, presided over my marriage to my lovely wife, and he chaired my ordination council. Two meals with Rick stand out momentously in connection to this project. Shortly before I moved to Reynoldsburg to join the staff at Reynoldsburg Baptist, Rick exhorted me with the sentiment referenced in the dedication, doing so as we ate breakfast at Cracker Barrel on Crittenden Drive. During the week of my third DMin seminar, Rick gifted me with one more opportunity to share a meal, this time at Chili's on Dixie Highway. A little more than a month later, 2 Corinthians 5:8 became a reality for Rick. Rick picked up the tab at that July 2018 meal, and in God's providence I won't have the opportunity to return the favor. Thankfully, Jesus has already picked up the tab on the next meal we'll

share together. Rick's pastoral example and friendship remain treasured gifts.

I cannot overstate my gratitude to Pastor Steve Cavanaugh and our church family at Reynoldsburg Baptist Church. Thank you, Pastor Steve, for your faithful ministry to our church family, and for the freedom, flexibility, and patience you have extended to me throughout this course of study. I am also grateful for the ongoing love and support demonstrated by the congregation of RBC. The generosity of Mrs. Loretta Daugherty through her scholarship endowment and the support of the scholarship committee made this course of study much more financially feasible. Thank you.

God was kind in the gift of parents who faithfully shared the gospel with me, modeled for me commitment to the Lord and his church, and have unwaveringly supported me in ways I know and (I'm sure) don't know. Mom and Dad, thank you.

Phoebe, Joanna, Will, and Nathan, you are a delight to me. What a joy it is to be your father, and now that the project is complete, I look forward to more opportunities to do all the things we love to do together. Never forget, God's glory is revealed in math.

Valerie, above all the rest, you are God's greatest human gift to me. Without your support, encouragement, and care of our family, this degree would not have been possible. You know my strengths and my weaknesses better than anyone, and yet you patiently show love and grace to me through thick and thin. I adore you.

Heavenly Father, you are the giver of every good and perfect (Jas 1:17). Thank you supremely for the gift of forgiveness and life in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of your Holy Spirit to bear good fruit to your glory. May you alone be glorified both through this writing and all fruit that you are pleased to produce through it.

Greg Savage

Reynoldsburg, Ohio

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“If a counselor is to teach faithfully, he must know and love divine truth. There must be a burning desire . . . to learn all he can of God’s truth. As a result, he will prepare for and develop skills in Bible interpretation and exegesis.”¹ So asserted Jay Adams, inaugurator of the modern biblical counseling movement. Adams conveyed a similar sentiment in his first counseling book, *Competent to Counsel*: “Preeminently, a nouthetic counselor must be conversant with the Scriptures. This is one reason why properly equipped ministers may make excellent counselors. A good seminary education rather than medical school or a degree in clinical psychology, is the most fitting background for a counselor.”² Thus, from the beginning, biblical counselors have valued the accurate interpretation of Scripture as a key ingredient in faithful counseling.

In the meantime, training materials and other resources for the preparation and growth of counselors have not always prioritized the development of these “skills in Bible interpretation and exegesis.” Rob Green, Pastor of Counseling and Seminary Ministries at Faith Church (Lafayette, Indiana) both rejoices and laments as he reflects on the typical training received by biblical counselors: “[Biblical counselors] are deeply persuaded by the necessity of Scripture to all issues in life. But our training has not necessarily made us experts in understanding the Bible. Many counselors learn a few

¹ Jay E. Adams, *Teaching to Observe: The Counselor as Teacher* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1995), 53.

² Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 61. Adams termed his counseling approach “nouthetic” from the Greek verb *νουθετέω* (“admonish,” “counsel,” or “instruct,” cf. Acts 20:31; Rom 15:14; Col 3:16).

dozen ‘go-to’ verses or passages and counsel virtually every case from them.”³ Green rejoices that the training of biblical counselors commonly produces strong convictions concerning the necessity and value of Scripture in counseling. However, Green laments that this same training does not regularly produce proficiency in biblical interpretation.

The purpose of this study is to consider the process of moving from the biblical text to its applications for counseling. Specific attention is given to reading, interpreting, and applying the Gospel of Matthew

Familiarity with the Literature

Diverse resources contribute to a hermeneutical strategy to read and apply the Gospel of Matthew in biblical counseling. These works include hermeneutics literature, commentaries, biblical and New Testament theologies, special studies in Matthew, introductions to the principles and practice of biblical counseling, biblical counseling training materials, and hermeneutics and commentary resources for biblical counseling.

Hermeneutics Literature

Numerous and divergent volumes abound addressing biblical hermeneutics. This section briefly surveys contributions in the areas of whole-Bible treatments, recent philosophical and theological proposals, and Gospel- and Matthew-specific approaches.

Whole-Bible treatments. Daniel Doriani offers a general strategy for interpretation in *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*.⁴ He promotes a six-step interpretive process adaptable across biblical genres.⁵ In his

³ Rob Green, “Using the Gospels in the Personal Ministry of the Word,” in *SC*, ed. Robert W. Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 354.

⁴ Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996).

⁵ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 29-186. Doriani uses an acronym (CAPTOR) for his six phases of interpretation. The acronym stands for Context (i.e., examining the literary and historical context of a passage), Analysis (i.e., analyzing the narrative or discourse), Problems (i.e., solving problems presented by the text), Themes (i.e., identifying themes within the text), Obligations (i.e., determining the

subsequent *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application*, Doriani complements his earlier work and tackles application of Scripture, primarily for preaching.⁶ *Putting the Truth to Work* identifies seven types of biblical texts (not identical to literary genre) and four ethical categories addressed by those biblical texts, for twenty-eight potential lines of application.⁷ Doriani's application strategy transcends biblical genres, but he dedicates two chapters to applying narrative texts, such as the Gospels. He also considers Christ-centered application and the challenge of selecting a text.

Longstanding evangelical introductions to hermeneutics such as Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* and Grant Osborne's *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* also provide introductions to interpretation and detailed attention to individual genres.⁸ *How to Read the Bible* devotes a chapter to interpretive issues for each canonical genre. Fee and Stuart distinguish between the genres of Gospel and OT historical narratives and Acts. They view the nature of the Gospels, the historical contexts of both Jesus and the authors, and literary context as key considerations for interpretation.

Osborne's *Spiral* is a more advanced introduction than Fee and Stuart's, and he includes Gospels in his treatment of narrative texts. Among his critiques of modern critical approaches, Osborne laments the imposition of modern literary categories on ancient genres. As a corrective to this trend, Osborne affirms David Aune's treatment of the Gospels as a unique and ancient genre in *The New Testament in Its Literary*

obligations the text establishes for application), and Reflection (i.e., reflecting on both the point and redemptive thrust of the passage). Doriani, vii.

⁶ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

⁷ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82-92, 103-16. Doriani's seven types of texts are rules, ideals, doctrines, redemptive acts in narratives, exemplary acts in narratives, images, and songs or prayers. Doriani, 82-92. His four categories are duty, character, goal, and discernment. Doriani, 103-16.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Environment.⁹ Osborne outlines a seven-fold methodology for interpreting narratives.¹⁰ In addition to the interpretative task, Osborne also devotes significant attention to applied hermeneutics, specifically focusing on biblical theology, systematic theology, and homiletics as the beneficiaries of sound biblical interpretation.

In many ways, Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson's *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* is in the mold of Doriani, Fee and Stuart, and Osborne.¹¹ The interpretation strategy of *Invitation* is a seven-step approach transcending biblical genre with genre analysis being one phase in the process.¹² Köstenberger and Patterson envision interpretation as a triad of historical analysis (e.g., historical settings within the text), literary analysis (i.e., canon, genre, and language considerations), and theological analysis (i.e., identifying theological contributions of a passage). Köstenberger and Patterson focus on application in the activities of preaching and teaching.

Recent philosophical and theological proposals. Whole-Bible treatments like those above focus primarily on the grammatical-historical method of interpreting Scripture. Some, like Osborne, address theology as an application of interpretation, while others, like Köstenberger and Patterson, explicitly incorporate theological considerations. Other treatments in the past forty years have focused more on the philosophy of hermeneutics—focusing especially on the relationships between the author, text, and

⁹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 215; cf. David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 17-76.

¹⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 216-21. Osborne's seven steps for interpreting narrative texts are structural analysis, stylistic analysis, redactional analysis, exegetical analysis, theological analysis, contextualization, and suggestions for sermons from narrative texts. Osborne, 216-21.

¹¹ Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011).

¹² Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 82. Köstenberger and Patterson's seven interpretive steps involve history (especially the historical setting in which events took place), canon (a passage's place within the canon of Scripture), genre, discourse context, word study, figurative language analysis, and theology. They treat Gospel as NT historical narrative and distinguish parables as a unique genre. Köstenberger and Patterson, 369-411, 423-41.

reader—and the role of theology in the interpretive task. Leading biblical counselors have argued that counseling is a theological practice, therefore a hermeneutic for counseling may benefit from the insights of these proposals.¹³

One of the earliest proposals for theological hermeneutics is *Text, Church and World* by Francis Watson.¹⁴ In that volume, Watson contends “biblical interpretation should concern itself primarily with the theological issues raised by the biblical texts within our contemporary ecclesial, cultural and socio-political contexts.”¹⁵ He develops “a hermeneutic and a corresponding exegetical practice oriented towards theological questions,” and he concludes with some aspects of a theological hermeneutic.¹⁶

Kevin Vanhoozer’s *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* confronts postmodern challenges to biblical interpretation and defends a theologically-grounded hermeneutic.¹⁷ In the face of postmodern objections, Vanhoozer makes three affirmations about meaning—“that there is a meaning in the text, that it can be known, and that readers should strive do so”—each of which, he contends, bears on “*the metaphysics, methodology, and morals of meaning*.”¹⁸ This repeated tripartite division anticipates Vanhoozer’s argument for a hermeneutics rooted in the Triune God.¹⁹

¹³ Jay Adams asserts “that the relationship between counseling and theology is organic; counseling cannot be done apart from theological commitments. . . . On the other hand, theological study leads to counseling implications” (Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986], 15). Heath Lambert opens his *Theology of Biblical Counseling* with a similar declaration: “Counseling is a theological discipline” (Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 11).

¹⁴ Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

¹⁵ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, vii.

¹⁶ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 221.

¹⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 24-25.

¹⁹ The three persons of the God-head, the three classical philosophical categories, and the three participants in the communicative and interpretive act are interwoven in Vanhoozer’s presentation. First, he depends upon the doctrine of God as he addresses the role of author and the metaphysics of meaning

W. Randolph Tate's *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, envisions the task of interpretation as a conversation between the worlds of the text and reader informed by the world of the author.²⁰ The world of the author (Tate's "world behind the text") includes the language and history in which the text was produced. The world of the text (Tate's "world within the text") is specifically the literary genres and sub-genres of the text.²¹ Finally, the world of reader (Tate's "world in front of the text") includes the presuppositions the reader brings to the text.

In *Scripture as Communication*, Jeannine Brown applies an eclectic model of communication for interpreting the biblical text.²² Her treatment of genre focuses exclusively on poetry, epistle, and narrative, with Gospels as a form of narrative.²³ Brown also devotes a chapter to literary context and two chapters to contextualization (i.e., application), including some reflections about the impact of genre on contextualization.²⁴

Like Vanhoozer, Graeme Goldsworthy argues for a theological understanding of hermeneutics in *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation*.²⁵ Specifically, Goldsworthy argues for the centrality

(additionally, he employs philosophical contributions from common-sense realism and speech-act theory). Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 25-26. Second, he depends upon Christology as he considered the role of the text and the epistemology of meaning. In this treatment, he also incorporates critical social theory and Alvin Plantinga's and Nicholas Wolterstorff's new Reformed epistemology to defend "the literal sense [of the text] as the norm for interpretation" (Vanhoozer, 26-27). Third, he utilizes pneumatology and sanctification in his approach to the role of the reader and the ethics of meaning, while also incorporating various philosophical contributions. Vanhoozer, 27-29.

²⁰ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 5, Kindle.

²¹ In his treatment of genres, Tate uses the Gospel of Matthew as an example in which structural patterns have been used to convey truth about Jesus. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 143-47.

²² Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). Brown's approach incorporates observations from the fields of language theory (e.g., speech-act theory and relevance theory) literary theory, and narrative theology into her model. Brown, 29-55.

²³ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 140ff.

²⁴ Brown pictures contextualization as both movement (i.e., moving back and forth between the biblical text and the reader) and participation (i.e., a recognition of the overlap between the reader's world and the author's textual world). Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 238-43.

²⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of*

of Christ and his gospel in the interpretative process. He highlights biblical theology as a critical part of interpretation and a primary means of connecting the text with the reader.²⁶ Literary considerations—like genre and context—also bear significantly on the interpretive process.²⁷ For Goldsworthy, this wedding of biblical theology with literary and textual analysis has a purpose: the goal of hermeneutics is “reading God’s word with understanding so that we might be conformed more and more to the image of Christ.”²⁸

Genre and Matthew-specific treatments. These whole-Bible treatments and recent philosophical proposals address genre-specific concerns across the spectrum of biblical literature. Other authors attend exclusively to a single genre. For the present study, contributions focusing on the Gospels are of particular interest. Jonathan Pennington’s *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* engages both theoretical and practical matters for handling this genre wisely.²⁹ He identifies three ways to read the biblical text—historically, literarily, and canonically/theologically— and details an eight-step narrative analysis approach to read the Gospels.³⁰ Part of this eight-step process includes interpreting each Gospel passage within its range of contexts.³¹ Pennington also reflects on applying and teaching the

Evangelical Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

²⁶ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 262-63.

²⁷ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 29, 155-56, 199ff.

²⁸ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 314.

²⁹ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

³⁰ Pennington proposes the following eight steps: (1) isolate the literary unit, (2) read the story multiple times, (3) identify the setting and the characters, (4) observe the story, (5) isolate the different scenes, (6) analyze the narrative, (7) think about the contexts, and (8) summarize the pericope. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 202-03.

³¹ According to Pennington, this range of contexts is comprised of acts, cycles, literary structures, the whole-Gospel context (including the “Fourfold Gospel Book”), and the “kingdom-focused, redemptive-historical context of the whole canon” (Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 186-203).

Gospels. To this end, he prioritizes God-centered application and presents a three-fold set of “framing questions” for thinking about application.³²

Timothy Wiarda also concentrates exclusively on the Gospel genre in *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology*.³³ Wiarda seeks to advance on standard, evangelical treatments of hermeneutics by considering four specific issues of Gospel interpretation: understanding the portrayal of individual characters in the Gospel narratives, the place of descriptive details in scenes and plots, the relationship between theology and story, and the consequences of the “episodic nature of the Gospel narratives.”³⁴ For Wiarda, faithful exposition that accounts for these features should lead to practical application for the good of the church.³⁵

David Starling’s *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* considers the interpretive task in a unique fashion.³⁶ Starling strives to understand and learn from the hermeneutical method of the biblical writers as they interpreted and incorporated antecedent Scripture into their own writing. While Starling limits his scope to singular interpretive topics in selected biblical books, he considers Matthew’s Gospel and the “hermeneutics of obedience” therein.³⁷ From and

³² Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 221. For the biblical counselor, Pennington’s framing questions (and the respective realities they represent: the fallen condition, the redemptive solution, and virtue formation) parallel strikingly with the three trees (thorn bush, cross, and fruit tree, respectively) in David Powlison’s three-tree model for biblical change as published by Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008). See also Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H Academic, forthcoming), chap. 10.

³³ Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010).

³⁴ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 3.

³⁵ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 200-06.

³⁶ David I. Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

³⁷ Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship*, 93-103.

for the first Gospel, Christ is the key to understanding Matthew and all Scripture, and the rest of Scripture is the key to understanding the person and work of Christ.³⁸

Commentaries

Today's students and pastors suffer from no shortage of commentaries to aid them in their study of the Gospel of Matthew. D. A. Carson contributed the Matthew commentary in the EBC set.³⁹ Carson recognizes the Gospels as a unique literary genre that is in some ways a mixture of multiple genres: "history, biography, theology, confession, catechism, tract, homage, or letter."⁴⁰ In keeping with the format of this set, Carson's commentary addresses prolegomena concerns and then provides a verse-by-verse exegesis of the Gospel. R. T. France prepared the comprehensive NICNT volume on Matthew.⁴¹ Having written elsewhere about introductory concerns,⁴² France briefly addresses issues like structure and author, then he moves quickly into a verse-by-verse exegesis of the first Gospel.

On par with Carson's and France's commentaries, Osborne authored the ZECNT Matthew commentary.⁴³ In addition to standard introductory matters, Osborne also outlines a method for studying and preaching the Gospel.⁴⁴ His treatment of each Matthean passage includes a description of the passage's literary context, a short

³⁸ Leveraging the language of those who falsely dichotomize between the "red letters of Jesus' words" and the rest of Scripture, Starling summarizes his hermeneutical conclusions this way: "The red letters of Matthew's Gospel are joined to the black in an indispensable, mutually authorizing, and mutually interpretive relationship; what God has joined together no interpreter should attempt to separate" (Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship*, 102).

³⁹ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, EBC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Kindle.

⁴⁰ Carson, *Matthew*, "Introduction," 12.a, para. 2.

⁴¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

⁴² See R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

⁴³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Kindle.

⁴⁴ Osborne, *Matthew*, "Introduction," "How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew."

paragraph summarizing the main idea of the passage, a translation of the passage, a discussion of the text's structure and literary form, an exegetical outline, a verse-by-verse commentary, and a section on applying the passage's theology. Unlike most commentators, Osborne concludes his commentary with an exploration of Matthew's theology.⁴⁵

Though less technical, the contributions in the BECNT and PNTC series also provide help to the student of Matthew while providing some direct engagement with the Greek text of the Gospel. David Turner prepared the BECNT volume and, like Carson's commentary, devotes extended attention to introductory matters (e.g., Gospel overview, literary concerns, etc.) before transitioning to an outlined exegesis after the pattern common in that series.⁴⁶ Leon Morris's PNTC work also provides a thorough but accessible commentary of the Gospel.⁴⁷ The body of their comments do not require knowledge of biblical Greek, but neither Turner nor Morris shy away from addressing original language issues in footnotes and additional comments. Though dated, William Hendriksen's commentary in his New Testament Commentary Series is similar in size, detail, and technicality to the BECNT and PNTC volumes.⁴⁸

The contributions in the BST and NAC series are less technical than the aforementioned works but are nonetheless are valuable for pastors and others concerned with faithfully handling Matthew. Michael Green's BST contribution provides a standard treatment of introductory matters followed by commentary that treats sections of the Gospel (e.g., 1:1-17, 18-25; 2:1-12; etc.) at a time.⁴⁹ Craig Blomberg's NAC treatment of

⁴⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, "Theology of Matthew."

⁴⁶ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁴⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992).

⁴⁸ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973).

⁴⁹ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, BST (Downers Grove,

Matthew, like France, only briefly treats introductory matters, particularly in consideration of his intended audience: “busy pastors and laypersons.”⁵⁰ Blomberg describes his approach to the text as one of “cautious evangelical redaction criticism.”⁵¹

Even less technical by design is the contribution of Michael Wilkins in the NIVAC series.⁵² The unique contribution of this volume (like others from the same series) is the tripartite division of commentary for each passage. Wilkins provides comments about the original meaning of a selection of verses. This section is followed by a “Bridging Contexts” section in which the author addresses aspects of the passage that may be historically constrained in contrast to timeless truths conveyed. The third section is devoted to matters of “Contemporary Significance” where Wilkins takes up the issue of modern-day application.

Craig Keener takes a different approach in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*.⁵³ Keener addresses two areas of interpretation throughout: “analysis of the social-historical contexts of Matthew and his traditions on one hand, and pericope-by-pericope suggestions concerning the nature of Matthew’s exhortations to his Christian audience on the other.”⁵⁴ John Nolland evidences a more moderate approach in his edition in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series.⁵⁵ Nolland’s primary focus is on “the story Matthew has to tell and how he tells it.”⁵⁶ For each

IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 22, Logos Bible Software.

⁵¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, Author’s Preface.

⁵² Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁵³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), Logos Bible Software.

⁵⁴ Keener, *Matthew*, 1.

⁵⁵ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

⁵⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, xvii.

passage, Nolland presents a verse-by-verse technical exegesis preceded by an extensive bibliography.

In the WBC series, Donald Hagner authored the two-volume analysis, which follows the standard WBC layout: a fresh translation followed by Form/Structure/Setting, verse-by-verse commentary, and explanatory sections.⁵⁷ In the commentary portion, Hagner addresses the meaning of the text using historical critical exegesis. In each passage's explanatory section, Hagner offers suggestive application for that passage.⁵⁸

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison's contribution to Matthean scholarship comes as a three-volume behemoth in the ICC series.⁵⁹ They approach the Gospel text primarily with an historical-critical methodology and use a five-part division in their discussion of each passage.⁶⁰ Ulrich Luz, likewise, produced three volumes in the Hermeneia series.⁶¹ He combines various methodologies (including historical, structural, and redaction criticism) and examines the Gospel as communication from Matthew to his church(es). In his analysis, Luz also considers both the history of interpretation (*Auslegungsgeschichte*) and the history of the text's influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) in sermons, literature, and other media.⁶²

In addition to these standard commentaries, two other commentators offer

⁵⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), Logos Bible Software; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), Logos Bible Software.

⁵⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, xl-xlii.

⁵⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), Logos Bible Software.

⁶⁰ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 5, Logos Bible Software. The divisions in each section of the commentary address form and structure issues, source-critical matters, exegesis of the passage, a summary of exegetical observations and their relationship to Matthean theology, and a selected bibliography.

⁶¹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), Logos Bible Software; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), Logos Bible Software; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), Logos Bible Software.

⁶² Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 60-61.

distinctive contributions. Stanley Hauerwas wrote a theological commentary on Matthew in the BTCB series.⁶³ Hauerwas self-consciously reads contemporary life into his reflections on the first Gospel. He recognizes central concerns in Matthew (e.g., the relationship between the church and Israel) without identifying a single theme or primary argument as the Gospel's ordering principle.⁶⁴ Also distinct from common critical and literary approaches to the text is Manlio Simonetti's two volumes in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.⁶⁵ Simonetti divides Matthew's text into pericopes and reproduces reflections on each passage from the second century pens of Irenaeus and Tertullian to the sixth century writings of Gregory the Great.⁶⁶

Biblical and New Testament Theologies

Supplementing the detailed insights of commentaries, biblical and New Testament theologies aid the interpretive process by examining the development of key themes in Scriptures. Understanding these themes and their presence in biblical books provides the interpreter an enhanced perspective on the larger context in which a passage and book is located. George Eldon Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament* devotes fourteen chapters to prominent theological themes in the synoptic Gospels, while another chapter includes individual treatments of each of the synoptics.⁶⁷

Thomas Schreiner, in his *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, takes a predominately thematic approach and explores nineteen different concepts and

⁶³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, BTCB (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 32.

⁶⁵ Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, in vol. 1A of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 14-28*, in New Testament vol. 1B of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁶⁶ Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 297-98, 324-29; Simonetti, *Matthew 14-28*, 315-16.

⁶⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993).

their presence throughout the New Testament.⁶⁸ James Hamilton, on the other hand, takes a book-by-book approach in his biblical theology *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*.⁶⁹ However, rather than exploring unique themes for each book, Hamilton primarily concerns himself with the presence within each book of a single theme running through the pages of Scripture: God's glory revealed in salvation through judgment. In Matthew, this theme advances as the kingdom comes in salvation through judgment, a coming that has ethical consequences for the kingdom's citizens.⁷⁰ Throughout his work, Hamilton's end goal is "to help people know God."⁷¹

Theological Interpretation of the New Testament evidences another approach—book-by-book theological interpretation. Robert Gundry interacts with the Gospel of Matthew and examines the interplay between the first Gospel and the doctrines of Christology and soteriology.⁷²

Special Studies in Matthew

Furthermore, additional special studies help the reader comprehend other features of the first Gospel. For example, France's *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* addresses issues common to commentary introductions.⁷³ He considers the uniqueness of the Gospels as a literary genre and examines the literary structure of Matthew's Gospel. He explores the prominence of the concept of fulfilment in Matthew and the relationship

⁶⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁶⁹ James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁷⁰ Hamilton, *God's Glory*, 380.

⁷¹ Hamilton, *God's Glory*, 38.

⁷² Robert H. Gundry, "Matthew," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Daniel J. Treier, and N T. Wright, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 27-38.

⁷³ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 251.

between Matthew's Gospel and the church.

Some contributions to Matthean scholarship come as collections of essays on numerous characteristics of the first Gospel. Allison incorporates observations from the history of interpretation as well as his own readings in *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*.⁷⁴ In his collection of essays, *Studies in Matthew*, Luz addresses themes including Christology, ecclesiology, and Israel; and his concluding six essays reflect on hermeneutics in relationship to Matthew's Gospel.⁷⁵

Other works have a narrower focus and consider an isolated aspect or theological theme in the first Gospel. David Bauer examines Matthew through the lens of literary criticism and considers the literary structure of the Gospel in *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*.⁷⁶ He concludes that the structure of Matthew's Gospel is consequential for both the Gospel's Christology and its presentation of salvation history. Allison focuses exclusively on Matthew's Moses typology in *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*.⁷⁷ His treatment of this theme begins with the birth and infancy narrative of Matthew 1-2 and continues through the last five verses of the Gospel.

In addition to works like those above that examine macro-level issues, other treatments focus on a selected portion of Matthew's Gospel. Perhaps no section has received greater scrutiny than Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount. Carson's *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* gives a section-by-section exposition of the first two (of five) discourses in Matthew

⁷⁴ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

⁷⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 372.

⁷⁶ David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Bible and Literature Series 15 (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1988).

⁷⁷ Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

and the intervening narrative.⁷⁸ Pennington offers a historical, literary, and theological exposition on the Sermon in his *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*.⁷⁹ In addition to exposition, Pennington accounts for context, structure, and key concepts in the Sermon and sketches out a theology of human flourishing as it comes in the Sermon. Hanz Dieter Betz took a more critical approach in his volume on the Sermon in the Hermeneia commentary series: *A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*.⁸⁰ Betz recognizes the substantial influence the Sermon has had in the history of Western thought and so approaches it as “a piece of world literature, not as an exclusive text.”⁸¹

Introductions to the Principles and Practices of Biblical Counseling

With the publication of *Competent to Counsel* in 1970, Adams announced the arrival of the modern biblical counseling movement to return the Scriptures back into counseling practice. Adams understands counseling to be one aspect of pastoral ministry and in alignment with the purposes for which God gave the Scriptures (cf. Col 1:28; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 4:2).⁸² However, pastors do not bear the sole responsibility to counsel; this charge comes under the purview of all Christians (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16). In Adams’s

⁷⁸ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

⁷⁹ Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

⁸⁰ Hanz Dieter Betz, *A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁸¹ Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1.

⁸² Adams, *Competent*, 42-52.

estimation, “qualified Christian counselors properly trained in the Scriptures are competent to counsel – more competent than psychiatrists or anyone else.”⁸³

As the sub-title suggests, Adams prepared his *Ready to Restore: The Layman’s Guide to Christian Counseling* to provide a simple, non-technical introduction to counseling.⁸⁴ Adams advocates the use of biblical language to identify counselee’s problems, and he emphasizes identifying biblical solutions to those problems.⁸⁵

Essays from an array of authors make up John MacArthur’s *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*.⁸⁶ In his chapter “Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling,” Wayne Mack guides counselors to offer biblically accurate and appropriate instruction and to develop a knowledge of the Scriptures.⁸⁷ Mack’s recommendations prioritize sound interpretation and application of the biblical text.

In *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Paul Tripp contends, “God transforms people’s lives as people bring his Word to others.”⁸⁸ Tripp details a four-part framework for Christ’s people to engage with and counsel one another from Scripture.⁸⁹ In the third and fourth components of his approach, counselors bring the truths of Scripture to bear on the lives of those they counsel. According to Tripp, counselors should speak truth to their counselees through biblical confrontation and should establish an agenda for change out of a biblically

⁸³ Adams, *Competent*, 18.

⁸⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman’s Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1981).

⁸⁵ Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 52, 57-61.

⁸⁶ John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack, eds., *CHCB* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

⁸⁷ Wayne A. Mack, “Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 166-73.

⁸⁸ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 19.

⁸⁹ Tripp, *Instruments*, 108-12. The four aspects of Tripp’s counseling framework are Love, Know, Speak, and Do.

informed assessment of the person (including desires, responses, etc.), their situation, and Scripture's goals and methods for transformation.

Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp's *How People Change* undergirds the counseling framework and approach in Tripp's *Instruments* by offering a biblical vision for the process of personal change.⁹⁰ Originally formulated by David Powlison and based on Jeremiah 17:5-10, Lane and Tripp conceptualize personal transformation with a four-part biblical and theological illustration of life and change.⁹¹ Reflecting on the fundamental cohesiveness Scripture—despite its varied literary forms—they affirm, “Scripture can seem like a random collection of stories, poems, teaching, and commands. Yet when you examine the Bible carefully, you see that it does provide an overall picture of life.”⁹² Their model for Christian growth reflects this overall picture of life.

Biblical Counseling Training Materials

Some organizations offer training in the counseling approaches detailed above and include some treatment of hermeneutics in their training.⁹³ Robert Kellemen is the

⁹⁰ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*.

⁹¹ The parts of their illustration are heat (i.e., circumstances—hardships and blessings—in life), thorns (i.e., sinful responses to the heat), cross (i.e., God and his gracious provisions in Christ that enable his people to respond righteously to heat), and fruit (i.e., righteous responses of God's people to heat). Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

⁹² Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 81.

⁹³ Through the Institute for Nouthetic Studies (INS), Jay Adams continues to train counselors. INS offers twelve courses in a wide range of counseling topics, one of which is a 14-lecture class titled “The Use of Scripture in Biblical Counseling.” Jay Adams, “The Use of Scripture in Biblical Counseling,” unpublished lecture notes from INS, accessed December 8, 2017. Of the training materials reviewed, this course offers counselors the most specified treatment of hermeneutics. The second half of this course's lectures are devoted to interpreting and applying Scripture in biblical counseling. Adams identifies five types of textual analysis in which counselors must engage to interpret a biblical text: grammatical, historical, systematic/biblical-theological, literary/rhetorical, and telic. Adams, 38-63. In his treatment of literary analysis, Adams attends to features of various literary genres. For the Gospels, he observes three distinctives within the genre: the Gospels (1) vary in structure and content, (2) report different times and events, and (3) each have unique aims and purposes. Adams, 52-53. Additionally, Adams recognizes a reciprocal relationship between theology and interpretation and identifies Christ and his cross as a primary subject and concern for counselors in all passages. Adams, 45, 48-49. In his treatment of application, Adams encourages counselors to be concrete in their application and explicit in their explanation of how to apply a passage. Adams, 68-69.

In their effort to equip counselors, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) offers a three-phase certification process (“Certification,” ACBC, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/certification>). As part of the learning phase, counselors attend a basic

Pastor of Counseling and Equipping at Bethel Church in northwest Indiana, the Vice President of Strategic Planning and Academic Dean at Faith Bible Seminary, and founder and director of Resurrection Power Multipliers (RPM) Ministries. Kellemen wrote a book and two-part curriculum to aid in the training of biblical counselors. His first volume, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy*, is a pastor's guidebook for launching and developing sustainable biblical counseling ministries in local churches.⁹⁴ Kellemen gives pastors a four-stage process of preparation and development, with the third stage, "Equipping Godly Ministers for Ministry," centering on equipping biblical counselors in four areas (or "dimensions"). Kellemen identifies content (described as "complete in knowledge") as one of four dimensions in which would-be counselors must be trained.⁹⁵ For Kellemen, this content training should address six doctrines specifically focused for biblical counseling, and Kellemen recommends pastors rely on their church's education ministry to provide training in general theology and hermeneutics.⁹⁶

training course. Within this basic training, trainees receive instruction on six key elements for counseling: Gather Data, Discern Problems (Interpretation), Building Involvement, Giving Hope, Give Instruction, and Assign Homework ("Fundamentals Track: Denver 2015," ACBC, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/product/fundamentals-track-denver-2015>). The fifth element, Instruction, teaches counselors to "rely upon the inerrant and powerful Word of God," which involves two aspects: "handle the Scriptures carefully" and "use texts for the purpose God gave them" (James Newheiser, "Key Elements 5 & 6," [unpublished lecture notes from Fundamentals Training Conference, Littleton, CO, March 2015], 53, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/product/fundamentals-track-denver-2015>). While once teaching this section of the training, James Newheiser made the following observation: "The best thing you can do in order to be trained as a biblical counselor is to study the Bible . . . the best way you can really grasp the Scripture—so you're not just plucking verses here and there, but you know what this verse means in its context—is to study through entire books of the Bible verse by verse and know how to use those to help people with their spiritual problems" (Newheiser, "Key Elements 5 & 6" [lecture presented at Fundamentals Training Conference, Littleton, CO, March 2015, 2015], accessed December 8, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/product/fundamentals-track-denver-2015>). Newheiser serves as the Director of the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship (IBCD). This organization also offers a three-level Care and Discipleship Course (CDC) that satisfies the training requirements for ACBC certification. The course follows the same approach as ACBC in teaching counselors to handle Scripture in counseling. IBCD, *Care and Discipleship Handbook*, vol. 1.6 (Escondido, CA: IBCD, 2013), 26.

⁹⁴ Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011).

⁹⁵ Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors*, 183. Kellemen's four dimensions (or "4Cs") of training are Character, Content/Conviction, Competence, and Community (Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors*, 183).

⁹⁶ Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors*, 203-05. Kellemen's six areas of theology are God's

To aid local churches in this four-dimensional content training, Kellemen also produced the two-volume series *Equipping Biblical Counselors*. The first volume, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, centers on content training and addresses eight doctrines consequential for biblical counseling.⁹⁷ In the first chapter, Kellemen offers a condensed biblical theology of his eight doctrines. He presents the doctrines with this approach in order to help counselors “to view the Bible accurately and use the Bible competently,” and “to handle God’s Word skillfully and artfully.”⁹⁸ The second chapter of *Gospel-Centered Counseling* argues for the supremacy of the gospel, Scripture, and the church for counseling in a fallen world. As Kellemen turns from the doctrine of Scripture to the remaining seven doctrines, he sets out his intent for the remainder of this work and the companion volume: “I’ve designed the rest of this book, along with the second book in this series, *Gospel Conversations*, to equip us to grow as competent biblical counselors.”⁹⁹

Kellemen designed that companion volume, *Gospel Conversations*, as an equipping manual for group training of counselors. As one part of the multi-faceted preparation, groups revisit the “grand redemptive narrative” and eight doctrines detailed in the prior volume and consider their implications for a marriage counseling case.¹⁰⁰ The balance of *Gospel Conversations* develops twenty-one counseling competencies.¹⁰¹

Word, the Trinity, Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. For churches that do not offer classes in general theology and/or hermeneutics, Kellemen suggests churches create such classes or assign counseling trainees additional reading in these areas.

⁹⁷ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 18-19. To the six doctrines identified in *Equipping Counselors*, Kellemen adds sanctification and the church.

⁹⁸ Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, 24.

⁹⁹ Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 47-76.

¹⁰¹ Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*, 26. Kellemen divides these twenty-one competencies into four sets: five sustaining relational competencies, five healing relational competencies, six reconciling relational competencies, and five guiding relational competencies.

Hermeneutics and Commentary Resources for Biblical Counseling

In addition to these treatments of hermeneutics in the training process, various counselors have also published resources to equip fellow counselors in the process of reading, interpreting, and applying the Scriptures in counseling. Throughout his writing ministry, Adams has addressed the importance of hermeneutics for counseling in multiple publications. He first took up the issue in *The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling*.¹⁰² In that volume, Adams appealed to counselors to twin pursuits of understanding: understanding problems biblically and understanding the Scriptures “telically” (i.e., according to the purpose for which they were written). Adams instructs counselors to find the purpose of every passage they use by studying the Scriptures with the “telic goal” in mind and by looking for “telic clues” in the passage and throughout the Bible.¹⁰³

Adams again emphasized the importance of sound hermeneutics for counselors in his call to counseling excellence issued in *Committed to Craftsmanship in Biblical Counseling*, first published in 1977.¹⁰⁴ Adams recognizes three elements that influence the interpretation of Scripture: the human element (i.e., the interpreter must approach Scripture with a submissive heart), the literary element (i.e., the Bible is literature), and the divine element (i.e., the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit’s illuminating work is essential for faithful interpretation). The literary character of the Bible beckons the counselor to on-going growth in studying and interpreting the Scriptures. As Adams correctly observes,

[The Bible as literature] requires some notion of grammar. It necessitates some understanding of the history and social mores of the time. One must know something about the various genres of literature that are found from Genesis to Revelation. There is narrative, poetry, prophecy, parable, apocalyptic, proverb and

¹⁰² Jay E. Adams, *The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975).

¹⁰³ Adams, *Use of the Scriptures*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Committed to Craftsmanship in Biblical Counseling* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000).

gospel in the Bible. And each of these types of literature has its own canons of interpretation.¹⁰⁵

Adams later wrote his most detailed treatment of hermeneutical issues, *What to Do on Thursday: A Layman's Guide to the Practical Use of the Scriptures*.¹⁰⁶ Adams prepared that work to aid counselors “in teaching counselees how to solve problems from the Bible.”¹⁰⁷ Adams singles out three areas for the counselor and counselee’s interpretation: the word, the passage, and the purpose.¹⁰⁸ In addition to grammatical interpretation, passages also require historical, cultural, rhetorical, and theological interpretation. Adams includes an extended outline that addresses both general and special principles of interpretation. Adams concludes *What to Do on Thursday* considering the implementation of biblical truth in the life of the counselee.¹⁰⁹

In addition to these treatments, Adams also prepared two additional works to assist counselors in their interpretation and use of the Bible. His *The Christian Counselor's New Testament* contains Adams’s own English NT translation, and the work includes highlighting, marginal notes, and footnotes to assist the counselor in connecting the Scriptures with counseling.¹¹⁰ Adams also prepared a commentary series, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary*, covering the entire New Testament and Proverbs. His volume on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark are of particular interest.¹¹¹ He gives 216 pages to the Gospel of Matthew in a running commentary printed below the text of

¹⁰⁵ Adams, *Committed to Craftsmanship*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Jay E. Adams, *What to Do on Thursday: A Layman's Guide to the Practical Use of the Scriptures*, rev. ed. (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1995). The first edition was published in 1982.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *What to Do on Thursday*, xii.

¹⁰⁸ Adams, *What to Do on Thursday*, 62.

¹⁰⁹ *What to Do on Thursday* is assigned as required reading for the INS course “The Use of Scripture in Biblical Counseling” discussed above.

¹¹⁰ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's New Testament and Proverbs: A New Translation in Everyday English with Notations, Marginal References, and Supplemental Helps* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2000).

¹¹¹ Jay E. Adams, *The Gospels of Matthew and Mark*, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 1999).

Scripture. In the Introduction, Adams observes the following: “Of all the Gospels, Matthew is the one that holds the most possibilities for counselors.”¹¹²

Other counselors after Adams have also tackled the relationship between hermeneutics and biblical counseling. Michael Emlet’s *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* stands as the most explicit and thorough treatment of the issue.¹¹³ Emlet wrote *CrossTalk* to assist the counselor in understanding people and the Bible better.¹¹⁴ For Emlet, counselors must understand the meta-narrative of Scripture and interpret the Bible in light of this grand story to handle God’s Word faithfully. He offers a series of questions to help the counselor interpret passages within both their original, immediate context and the larger, redemptive-historical context.¹¹⁵ In order to apply Scripture to the counselee’s life, Emlet proposes that counselors think of their counselees simultaneously as sufferers, sinners, and saints. He then gives a set of interpretive questions to aid the counselor’s utilization of those three descriptions in the application of biblical truth.¹¹⁶

Powlison has also offered two contributions relative to hermeneutics and counseling. His *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* considers foundational concepts for biblical counseling, and he utilizes the first half of the book to address the use of Scripture.¹¹⁷ He devotes the first chapter to

¹¹² Adams, *Matthew and Mark*, 1. As representative of the First Gospel’s value for counseling, Adams highlights two features: (1) the Sermon on the Mount, and (2) Matthew’s focus on Jesus as the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. Adams suggests the Sermon “is full of instruction that might—in another place—provide the basis for an entire, in-depth book on counseling” (Adams, 1). Related to Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah, Adams observes that “many counselees are weak in their faith and need the sort of buttressing that this Gospel can give them. It is a faith-strengthening book and should be recognized and used as such by counselors” (Adams, 1).

¹¹³ Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), Kindle.

¹¹⁴ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 101-04.

¹¹⁶ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 104-05.

¹¹⁷ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003).

three interpretive points about Ephesians that influence his subsequent interpretation and application of that letter.^{118, 119}

Robert Kellemen and Jeff Forrey edited the Biblical Counseling Coalition title *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*.¹²⁰ This title consists of over twenty essays addressing the relationship between the Bible and counseling. Four chapters examine the use of specific literary genres in counseling, and Green provides the reflection on the Gospels, "Using the Gospels in the Personal Ministry of the Word."¹²¹ In that contribution, Green leverages aspects of the Gospel writers' presentations of Jesus to counsel a struggling family of four.¹²² Green concludes with three hermeneutical concepts—each Gospel writer wrote for specific theological reasons, each Gospel writer communicates the story of Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount provides an ethic for today—that informed his utilization of the Gospels.¹²³

Void in the Literature

A review of relevant resources indicates no shortage of assistance for readers of Scripture to develop their interpretive skills, including aids devoted exclusively to growing as readers and interpreters of the Gospels. In addition to fostering their own

¹¹⁸ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 18-34. His three points of observation are as follows: "Ephesians is practical theology" (in contrast to exegetical, systematic, or biblical theology), "Ephesians is a door to the rest of Scripture," and "Ephesians is hard to understand sometimes."

¹¹⁹ Additionally, Powlison also prepared and offered a training course, *Bible Reading for Personal Application*, that addresses the use of Scripture in personal, practical ways. David Powlison, *Bible Reading for Personal Application* (Glenside, PA: Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, 2012). Powlison presents a process he labels "Triangulation" for bringing Scripture to bear on life in practical ways. Powlison, 16. He also adapts from Emlet and categorizes passages into two broad categories ("short-step" and "long-step") based on the apparent ease with which passages can be applied personally. Powlison, 22.

¹²⁰ Robert Kellemen and Robert W. Jeff Forrey, eds., *SC*.

¹²¹ Green, "Using the Gospels," 353-66.

¹²² Specifically, Green focuses on Jesus as the suffering servant who beckons people to follow him (from Mark), Jesus's concern for true righteousness (from Matthew), Jesus's identity as king (from Matthew), and Jesus as the only way to eternal life (from John). Green, "Using the Gospels," 356-65.

¹²³ Green, "Using the Gospels," 365-66.

abilities, students of the first Gospel have access to a spectrum of studies—commentaries, biblical theologies, and special studies in the Gospel of Matthew—to aid them in better understanding Matthew’s Gospel. On the other side of the proposed study, biblical counseling stands on a commitment to the faithful use of the Scriptures in counseling. However, a gap exists in bringing the fruit of hermeneutics and biblical studies to bear on the counselor’s progress as a reader, interpreter, and applicator of Scripture.

In the areas of hermeneutics and exegesis, authors heavily weight their treatment towards reading and understanding Scripture and often only give cursory attention to application, and those that do address application often focus on preaching and teaching. Additionally, little attention is given to the influence of genre on application. Doriani wrote *Putting Truth to Work* to address the theory and method of applying the biblical text. While he does devote attention to applying narrative texts like the Gospels, he acknowledges that he does not consider “the effects of literary genre on application.”¹²⁴ Osborne’s *Hermeneutical Spiral* considers applied hermeneutics for the areas of biblical theology, systematic theology, and homiletics.¹²⁵ Pennington builds on Doriani’s previous work by emphasizing God-centered application and commending three framing questions for applying Gospel texts. However, Pennington’s primary concern is application for preaching and teaching.¹²⁶

Emlet’s *CrossTalk* provides counselors a framework for applying any biblical text, regardless of genre. He concedes his broad-strokes approach to Scripture: “I won’t address how the varied literature types (genres) of the Bible— such as narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and epistle— impact the way you interpret and use

¹²⁴ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, x, 161-212.

¹²⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 345ff.

¹²⁶ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 219-25.

Scripture.”¹²⁷ Moreover, in his work to provide counselors guidance in this area, Adams confessed limitations. Reflecting on his primary hermeneutics treatment, *What to Do on Thursday*, Adams recognizes the work as a starting point; it is a book “designed to introduce you to many [resources available to aid Bible study, like commentaries and dictionaries] and to set forth a simple method of Bible study and exegesis. It also shows how to apply and implement what you learn to life situations. This kind of text will get you started.”¹²⁸ In his introduction to his commentary for counselors on Matthew, Adams alerts the reader to the limitation of his own work there and expresses optimism for additional work applying Matthew’s Gospel to counseling. Adams surmises, “Of all the Gospels, Matthew is the one that holds the most possibilities for counselors . . . Because of this fullness, many things one would like to treat in detail must be handled only in a cursory manner.”¹²⁹

In an essay on the use of epistles in personal Word ministry, Heath Lambert, former Executive Director of ACBC, looks over the counseling landscape and perceives a void in genre-specific considerations in biblical counseling. Lambert admits, “The biblical counseling movement has focused on understanding the relevance of particular passages to the many problems that vex people as they live life in a shattered world. To my knowledge, there has not been a concentrated effort to show how various literary forms are uniquely helpful in doing this.”¹³⁰

Thesis

Scripture is the sufficient, authoritative foundation for all Christian ministry,

¹²⁷ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 3.

¹²⁸ Adams, *Committed to Craftsmanship*, 29-30.

¹²⁹ Adams, *Matthew and Mark*, 1.

¹³⁰ Heath Lambert, “Using the Epistles in the Personal Ministry of the Word,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 367.

including biblical counseling. Motivated by these convictions shared by a spectrum of biblical counselors, a thick reading of a biblical text (which accounts for both what and how that passage communicates), a three-dimensional approach to application, and counseling's three-trees framework equip counselors to plumb the depths of Scripture's riches for counseling. This thesis explores this movement from ancient text to present-day application in a counseling context for the Gospel of Matthew.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters support this thesis and present an approach for biblical counselors to grow in their reading, understanding, and application of the Gospel of Matthew for the benefit of those they counsel.

Chapter 2: The Scriptures Drive Counseling

Employing Robert Jones's metaphor of "driving" for the relationship between Scripture and counseling,¹³¹ this chapter will examine the "why" and the "what" of the Scripture's driving of counseling. The chapter will first survey the commitments of the robust doctrine of Scripture affirmed and applied by biblical counselors beginning with Adams. Building upon that foundation, the chapter will then summarize the leadership Scripture provides to counseling's theory and practice as well as Scripture's guidance for addressing counselees and their concerns.

Chapter 3: Reading and Understanding the Gospel of Matthew

This chapter will address hermeneutical issues for reading and understanding the Gospel of Matthew. In particular, consideration will be given to what the Gospel contains and how the evangelist communicates to his readers through episodes, Jesus's

¹³¹ Robert Jones, "The Christ-Centeredness of Biblical Counseling," in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 109.

teaching, and the book's overarching narrative. In view of these contents and methods of communications, the chapter will also provide a three-fold method to read and understand a Matthean passage

Chapter 4: A Method for Applying the Gospel of Matthew in Counseling

This chapter will follow on chapter 3's treatment of reading and understanding Matthew by first identifying characteristics of faithful biblical application. Based on these attributes, wise and discerning application will be examined as the effort to draw out Scripture's normative perspective for situational and existential guidance. The chapter concludes by examining a three-fold method to apply the Gospel of Matthew in counseling.

Chapter 5: Applying Matthew 14:22-33 in Counseling

This chapter will bring together the observations of the preceding chapters and apply the method from chapter 4 to Matthew 14:22-33 as the primary text. The treatment will also incorporate observations from other relevant Matthean passages (e.g., Matt 1:18-25; 6:25-34; etc.).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter will step back from the project and offer concluding and summary observations.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCRIPTURES DRIVE COUNSELING

The Bible has rightly occupied a central role in biblical counseling (BC) since its modern renewal in the ministry of Jay Adams.¹ Summarizing the convictions of biblical counselors (BCers), Robert Jones emphasizes the pride of place given to the Scriptures in counseling: “[BCers] believe that Scripture forms our counseling theory and practice. The Bible does not merely *inform* our counseling, as if it were simply one source of truth among several. Instead, the Bible *drives* our counseling.”² BCers, compelled by such convictions, have written at many times and in various ways about why the Scriptures drive BC and what the Scriptures drive for BC. This chapter surveys and synthesizes primary assertions and arguments about Scripture and counseling in those writings in anticipation of subsequent chapters’ examination of reading and applying the Scriptures—especially the Gospel genre—in BC.³

Why the Scriptures Drive Biblical Counseling

A robust doctrine of Scripture has always energized BC. Advocates argue that God’s Word should drive counseling because of Scripture’s inspiration, inerrancy, authority, necessity, sufficiency, and transforming power.

¹ Heath Lambert identifies the Puritans as precursors to modern biblical counselors that were followed by a period of theological neglect with respect to counseling until the release of Adams’s *Competent to Counsel*. See Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 25-35, Kindle; cf. Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970).

² Robert Jones, “The Christ-Centeredness of Biblical Counseling,” in *SC*, ed. Robert W. Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 109.

³ This chapter surveys primary ways BCers have predominantly agreed on why and how the Scriptures direct counseling. Nonetheless, diversity of thought and expression has characterized the BC movement. Lambert helpfully captures the fraternal twins of unity and diversity across BC. Lambert, *After Adams*, 24.

Inspiration and Inerrancy

The propulsion God’s Word supplies to counseling starts with a commitment to divine inspiration and inerrancy. Matthew Barrett succinctly articulates the verbal plenary inspiration of the original autographs: “There is a dual authorship to Scripture. In this view the human authors wrote exactly what they intended in their own distinct style, yet at the same time what they wrote was superintended by the Holy Spirit so that what the human author said, God said, down to the exact words and phrases.”⁴ Later, Barrett observes the derivative relationship inerrancy has with inspiration: “The inerrancy of Scripture naturally flows out of the inspiration of Scripture, and the former is a biblical corollary of the later. To believe in inerrancy is to affirm that the true God has breathed out a true Word.”⁵ Elsewhere, Paul Feinberg reliably defines inerrancy: “When all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.”⁶

Starting with Adams, the BC movement has been convinced of the inspiration and inerrancy of God’s Word. Adams reflects a commitment to divine inspiration in his counseling bombshell, *Competent to Counsel*, and perceives a direct relationship with Scripture as given by God’s Holy Spirit and the counselor’s task:

The Holy Spirit expects counselors to use his Word, the Holy Scriptures. We shall see *infra* that he gave it for such a purpose, and that it is powerful when used for that purpose (2 Tim 3:16, 17). His counseling work is ordinarily performed through the ministry of this Word. . . . It will be necessary to study the Scriptures to see what the Holy Spirit has told us about counseling.⁷

Elsewhere, Adams explicitly confesses verbal plenary inspiration: “[The biblical writers]

⁴ Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 225.

⁵ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 265.

⁶ Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 294.

⁷ Adams, *Competent*, 23.

were ‘carried along’ by the Holy Spirit, so that that final product was both theirs and his. . . . Paul assured believers, through Timothy, that ‘all Scripture is breathed out by God.’ That is to say, it is as much God’s Word as if it were spoken audibly from his own mouth.”⁸ Adams similarly acknowledges the importance of inerrancy for counseling: “My method is presuppositional. I avowedly accept the inerrant Bible as the standard of all faith and practice. The Scriptures, therefore, are the basis, and contain the criteria by which I have sought to make every judgment.”⁹ These foundational commitments to inspiration and inerrancy have similarly guided BCers after Adams.¹⁰

Authority

BCers also look to the authority of God’s Word. It is hard to improve on the Westminster Confession of Faith’s (WCF) statement on authority: “The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF 1.10).

Some theologians have sought to restrict the authority of Scripture to “its function of bringing people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”¹¹

⁸ Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 24, Kindle.

⁹ Adams, *Competent*, xxi, cf. 23; Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), xiii, 16-17.

¹⁰ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 36, 330-31; Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 52-53; David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 170.

¹¹ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), xvii. For a thorough and definitive critique of the proposal of Rogers and McKim, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers-McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

However, John Frame argues, “Scripture does not limit its authority” so narrowly.¹² Instead, Scripture requires that we live by all of God’s Word (Matt 4:4), recognizes that God can rightfully speak about anything, and confesses that Scripture’s redemptive purpose is broad such that “no area of human life is excluded from its concern.”¹³ For Barrett, the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* affirms the finality of Scripture’s authority: “Scripture alone is our *final* authority. . . . *Sola Scriptura* means that the Bible is our chief, supreme, and ultimate authority.”¹⁴ He continues, “All other authorities are to be followed only inasmuch as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.”¹⁵

BCers have embraced Scripture’s extensive authority. Adams classically affirms this viewpoint: “As soon as you add another standard for belief or behavior, you take away from biblical authority. . . . Conservative Christians affirm that the Scriptures are inerrant, the sole rule of faith and practice.”¹⁶ Additionally, he acknowledges that any authority contained in the instruction of a biblical counselor (BCer) “stems from the fact that nouthetic confrontation necessarily utilizes the full authority of God,” an authority communicated via the Scriptures.¹⁷

Later, David Powlison succinctly stakes out a similar position: “The Bible is absolute, eternal, infallible, authoritative, sufficient, perspicuous, unchanging, reliable truth, the Word of the living God.”¹⁸ More recently, Jeremy Pierre proposed two

¹² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 166.

¹³ Frame, *Word of God*, 166.

¹⁴ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 23.

¹⁵ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 23.

¹⁶ Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 20.

¹⁷ Adams, *Competent*, 56. See also Adams, *Theology*, 18-19; Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 16.

¹⁸ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 30.

characteristics of biblical authority consequential for counseling. First, the Scriptures carry “encyclopedic authority, meaning that on every topic the Bible addresses, it does so with the ultimate authority of God himself.”¹⁹ This authority parallels the affirmations of Adams and Powlison above. However, Pierre also draws out the “emphatic authority [of Scripture], meaning that whatever God draws our attention to as primary ought to capture our primary attention.”²⁰ A commitment to biblical authority—its encyclopedic and emphatic authority—continues to characterize BC as it has since Adams’s initial writings.

Necessity

The modern BC movement has also contended for the necessity of Scripture in faithful counseling. Once again, WCF supplies a trustworthy statement of this doctrine:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased (WCF 1.1).

If the statement ceased with the first sentence, one might infer necessity narrowly.

However, the statement continues. The second sentence portrays a broad necessity including knowing God’s will, as well as establishing and comforting “the church against the corruption of the flesh.” Necessity applies not only to conversion but to the on-going covenant relationship Jesus possesses with his people: “Jesus’ words, today, are found only in Scripture. So if we are to have a covenant relationship with Jesus, we must acknowledge Scripture as his Word. No Scripture, no Lord. No Scripture, no Christ.”²¹

¹⁹ Jeremy Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 98.

²⁰ Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient,” 98.

²¹ Frame, *Word of God*, 212.

BCers likewise affirm Scripture's necessity for counseling. For Adams, God's pre-Fall instructions evidence humanity's need for God's special revelation.²² Paul Tripp agrees.²³ The fall only exacerbated humanity's "dependence upon God's resources. God alone can regenerate [a person], instruct him, and empower him by his Spirit through the Scriptures."²⁴ For Heath Lambert, "The necessity of Scripture means that it is impossible to live the Christian life without the Bible."²⁵ Likewise, the Scriptures are necessary "for giving you a framework for understanding every aspect of your life."²⁶ Continuing in the trajectory set by Adams, BCers profess the necessity of the Scriptures for counseling.

Sufficiency

Along with the previous tenets, the sufficiency of Scripture is another critical piston in BC's doctrinal impulse.²⁷ Again, WCF proves a helpful starting point:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (WCF 1.6).

Three aspects of this statement are crucial for BC. First, the opening words—

²² Adams, *Theology*, 3-4.

²³ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 43, 45.

²⁴ Adams, *Manual*, 86.

²⁵ Lambert, *Theology*, 37.

²⁶ Pierre "Scripture Is Sufficient," 94. For Lelek, a framework is needed to interpret natural revelation accurately, including "to rightly understand anything about human psychology" (Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 50).

²⁷ The appeal to sufficiency has been stridently contested more by critics of BC than most of BC's affirmations. Thus, no affirmation has been more vigorously defended by BCers. It is beyond the scope of this treatment to detail the diverse defenses of BC's historic affirmations of sufficiency.

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary . . . is expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture”—expresses confidence that the Bible contains all the divine words mankind needs. Scripture is a sufficient repository for knowing or deducing God’s counsel on what is necessary “for [God’s] own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life.” Frame rightly emphasizes that sufficiency admits not the “sufficiency of specific information but sufficiency of divine words.”²⁸ Second, this sufficiency extends to “all things necessary for [God’s] own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life.” God provides all the divine instruction needed for every area of life. Thus, Frame summarizes, “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.”²⁹ Third, sufficiency does not exclude the relevancy of natural revelation (i.e., “light of nature”) or human reason (i.e., “Christian prudence”).³⁰ Rather than somehow adding to or taking away from divine revelation, the use of natural revelation and human reason is “a means of determining how the sufficient word of Scripture should be applied to a specific situation.”³¹

BCers back to Adams have affirmed Scripture’s sufficiency for counseling. Adams implies his conviction about sufficiency when he writes in *Competent*: “Qualified Christian counselors properly trained in the Scriptures are competent to counsel—more competent than psychiatrists or anyone else.”³² Elsewhere he says more directly on 2 Timothy 3:15-17: “This passage very plainly says that *all* that we need as the basic

²⁸ Frame, *Word of God*, 221.

²⁹ Frame, *Word of God*, 221.

³⁰ Frame, *Word of God*, 223.

³¹ Frame, *Word of God*, 224.

³² Adams, *Competent*, 18.

foundation and framework for helping others . . . has been given to us.”³³ He continues, “The God of all resource graciously has given [the resources for helping others] to us fully in his Word.”³⁴ For Adams, however, sufficiency does not deny a role for natural revelation and human reason. The value of scientific observation is not eliminated: “I do not wish to disregard science, but rather I welcome it as a useful adjunct for the purposes of illustrating, filling in generalizations with specifics, and challenging wrong human interpretations of Scripture, thereby forcing the student to restudy the Scriptures.”³⁵

Powlison later articulates similar commitments:

First, we must ask, does Scripture give us the materials and call to construct something that might fairly be called “systematic biblical counseling.” In fact, we do have the goods for a coherent and comprehensive practical theology of face-to-face ministry. Scripture is dense with explanations, with instructions, with implications. We have much work to do to understand and to articulate the biblical “model.” But we don’t have to make it up or borrow from models that others have made up as ways to explain people.³⁶

Elsewhere, Powlison describes BCers with reference to sufficiency:

[They are] interested in the sufficiency of Scripture for informing and defining counseling ministry because resources internal to the Christian faith are comprehensively about what counseling is about. Scripture is sufficient, not in that it is exhaustive, containing all valid knowledge, but in that it rightly aligns a coherent and comprehensive system of counseling that is radically at odds with every a-theistic model.³⁷

From its modern renewal, the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling has propelled BC.³⁸

³³ Adams, *Manual*, 97.

³⁴ Adams, *Manual*, 97.

³⁵ Adams, *Competent*, xxi.

³⁶ David Powlison, “The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls,” *JBC* 23, no. 2 (2005): 2-3.

³⁷ David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 276.

³⁸ See Lambert, *Theology*, 37-61; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 204-22; Pierre “Scripture Is Sufficient,” 94-108; Douglas Bookman, “The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling,” in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling: A Basic Guide to the Principles and Practice of Counseling*, ed. by John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Dallas: Word, 1994), 63-97; Ed Hinson and Howard Eyrich, eds., *Totally Sufficient: The Bible and Christian Counseling*, rev. ed. (Tain, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004); Heath Lambert, “Introduction: The Sufficiency of Scripture, the Biblical Counseling Movement, and the Purpose of this Book,” in *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture*, ed. by Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2015), 1-24; Paul Tautges

Transforming Power

BCers have also affirmed the primacy of God’s Word for counseling because of Scripture’s self-attesting power to change its readers. In *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Frame demonstrates the diverse ways Scripture attests to the power of God’s speech and summarizes that “God accomplishes all his works by his powerful word: creation, providence, judgment, grace.”³⁹ Frame also reminds his readers of the transforming power of God’s speech acts: “It is important that we understand God’s word not only as a communication of linguistic content to our minds, though it is that, but as a great power that makes things happen.”⁴⁰ In short, God’s personal word—including but extending beyond the Bible—is not merely informative but is powerful to “make things happen.” Frame recognizes this attribute of power as a predicate of God’s written Word:

Since Scripture is God’s Word, it, too, conveys God’s power. It is our present access to the words of the prophets and apostles, which by the Spirit’s power bring upon their hearers both God’s blessing and curse (Isa 6:9-10; Matt 13:10-17; Rom 1:16; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:4-5; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13). We should not think of the written Word as a mere object of our reflection. It is living and active (Heb 4:12). It revives the soul, makes us wise, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes (Ps 19:7-9). Scripture makes us wise to salvation (2 Tim 3:15). Psalm 19 and 147:15-20 implicitly compare the power of the written Word to the power of God in creation.⁴¹

Historically, BCers have relied on Scripture’s self-attesting power to change its readers. For example, in *Theology of Christian Counseling*, Adams states, “There is power in God’s Word. . . . The Word has performative power.”⁴² A few paragraphs later, he connects Scripture’s effectual power with the Holy Spirit’s work. After recalling the Spirit’s fruit Galatians 5:22-23, Adams writes, “This is the fruit of the *Spirit* (grown and

and Steve Viars, “Sufficient for Life and Godliness,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 47-61; Steve Viars and Rob Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” in *CCBC*, ed. James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 89-105.

³⁹ Frame, *Word of God*, 52.

⁴⁰ Frame, *Word of God*, 50. In this and the prior quote, Frame uses “God’s word” to refer to God’s personal, verbal expression, including but not limited to the Scriptures. See Frame, *Word of God*, 47.

⁴¹ Frame, *Word of God*, 202.

⁴² Adams, *Theology*, 34.

watered by the Word). . . . The fruit will not come any other way than by the Spirit producing it in his people by his Word. The Word has power, because the Spirit wrote and empowers it.”⁴³ Randy Patten contrasts the power of God’s Word with the relative weakness of the counselor: “I’ve come to learn that *God and his Word are strong and effective even when you as a counselor are weak and needy.*”⁴⁴

BCers have also appealed to specific passages for the Holy Spirit-enabled, transformative power of the Scriptures. The profitability of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 anticipates this power.⁴⁵ So Adams writes, “The Holy Spirit expects counselors to use his Word, the Holy Scriptures. We shall see *infra* that he gave it for such a purpose, and that it is power when used for that purpose (2 Tim 3:16, 17).”⁴⁶ Likewise, counselors have drawn from the Scripture’s capacity to change described in Psalm 19:7-14.⁴⁷ From these verses, Powlison observes that God “speaks with intent and power to change us.”⁴⁸

BCers have also looked to Romans 15:4.⁴⁹ Adams contends, “*People with peculiarly difficult problems* need hope. . . . Such persons need to be assured that there is hope in Christ. That hope lies in the power of His Word ministered by His Spirit (cf. Rom 15:4, 13).”⁵⁰ Counselors have also used Hebrews 4:12.⁵¹ From this verse, Garrett Higbee

⁴³ Adams, *Theology*, 35.

⁴⁴ Randy Patten, “Lessons Learned through Counseling Experience,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 381.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Manual*, 8, 93-95, 158; Adams, *Theology*, xiii, 34, 162, 234; Powlison, “Sufficiency of Scripture,” 3; Tautges and Viars, “Sufficient for Life,” 53-55; Kevin Carson, “The Richness and Relevance of God’s Word,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 33.

⁴⁶ Adams, *Competent*, 23; cf. 51.

⁴⁷ Patten, “Lessons Learned,” 381; Tautges and Viars, “Sufficient for Life,” 49-53; John Street, “Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?” in *CHCB*, ed. John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 44-46.

⁴⁸ Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 167.

⁴⁹ Adams, *Competent*, 24, 84; Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 43-44.

⁵⁰ Adams, *Manual*, 42.

⁵¹ Adams, *Manual*, 437; Adams, *Theology*, 112; Lambert, *Theology*, 63; Patten, “Lessons Learned,” 381; Powlison, *Seeing*, 130, 158, 216; Tautges and Viars, “Sufficient for Life,” 56-59; Steve

observes, “We equip our people to trust the Bible as the final authority and to have the power to be transformative. Hebrews 4:12 says God’s Word is sharper than a two-edged sword. It cuts both ways. In other words, it sanctifies or grows the counselor while they are preparing to counsel and, of course, it has the power to change the person in need.”⁵²

Revvng the Engine

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the human authors of Scripture wrote precisely what God providentially intended such that the Scriptures are without error (2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21; cf. Titus 1:2). As God’s Word, the Scriptures also speak with God’s ultimate authority (2 Pet 1:19-20; 1 John 5:9). God created humankind dependent on his verbal guidance in order to live faithfully before him, and humanity’s fall into sin exacerbated this need (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-17; 3:10ff.; Rom 5:20-21; 7:7ff.). God sufficiently provided in the Bible all the divine words needed for salvation and growth in Christlikeness (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:15-17; Heb 4:12; cf. 2 Pet 1:3ff.). Consequently, the Holy Spirit powerfully uses his Word to convert and transform image bearers in the midst of life in a fallen world (Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:22-25; 2 Pet 1:3ff.). With these convictions, BCers contend the Bible must drive any counseling aptly identified as biblical.

What the Scriptures Drive about Biblical Counseling

If the Word of God is counseling’s engine, then theology is counseling’s transmission. Through this transmission, Scripture moves counseling ahead in a range of areas, including establishing what counseling is and how counselors understand and address counselees and their concerns.

Viars, “‘Brian’ and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder,” in Scott and Lambert, 83.

⁵² Garrett Higbee, “The Practicality of the Bible for Becoming a Church of Biblical Counseling,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 239.

Theology Is Counseling's Transmission: The Bible Applied in Counseling

Though God's Word is neither properly counseling's textbook⁵³ nor instruction manual,⁵⁴ the Scriptures are not less. They are more.⁵⁵ The Bible is a diverse array of documents from various literary genres penned by multiple human authors over more than a millennia and bound by the inspiration of the One Divine Author. Because of this unique character, bringing the Bible's powerful, sufficient content to bear upon twenty-first century ideas and issues—including counseling concerns—takes effort. The exertion of this effort is what Frame defines simply as “theology”: “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life.”⁵⁶ When holy writ is applied to life, theology happens.

For Frame, theology involves three complementary perspectives of knowledge: “the application of Scripture (normative perspective) by persons (existential perspective) to situations (situational perspective). It [does] not seek to replace Scripture or to improve on it but to use Scripture in the situations of human life.”⁵⁷ Frame illustrates how

⁵³ On the website of the Institute for Nouthetic Studies (INS), Adams asserts, “It is right to say that the Bible is *the* textbook on counseling” (Jay E. Adams, “I have heard that you call the Bible a textbook for counseling. How can you say that?” Institute for Nouthetic Studies, accessed November 15, 2019, <http://www.nouthetic.org/i-have-heard-that-you-call-the-bible-a-textbook-for-counseling-how-can-you-say-that>). He continues, “It is *God's* kind of textbook,” and goes on to identify Proverbs as “the *ideal* textbook.” Similarly, Tim Pasma declares, “The Scripture is the sufficient, divine, counseling textbook” (Tim Pasma, “Sola or Solo and Biblical Counseling,” Association of Certified Biblical Counselors [Blog], November 30, 2017, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/sola-solo-biblical-counseling/>). Despite his strong affirmations, Adams does concede, “Now, as to its being a *textbook*, of course, it doesn't resemble modern textbooks.” Neither Adams nor Pasma seem to be colloquial or metaphorical in their use of “textbook.” In both articles, the term strikes an emphatic tone. In their efforts to uphold the necessity and sufficiency of the Scriptures for counseling, Adams's and Pasma's “textbook” label is anachronistic, as Adams's acknowledgement suggests. Rather than labeling Scripture as a “textbook” (except colloquially or metaphorically), it seems preferable to acknowledge what the Bible is with regards to counseling—the divinely sufficient and necessary primary source text—without claiming it to be something it does not claim for itself.

⁵⁴ Adams would seem to agree given his self-professed rationale for his *Manual*. See Adams, *Manual*, xi-xii.

⁵⁵ So Robert Kellemen stresses, “Our counseling is sterile and dead if we see the Bible as an academic textbook or even as a textbook for counseling” (Robert W. Kellemen, “The Bible Is Relevant for That?” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 181).

⁵⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 81.

⁵⁷ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 80-81. Frame earlier explains his perspectives in relation to God's law: “The normative perspective focuses on God's authority as expressed through his law,” “the situational perspective focuses on the law as revealed both in Scripture and in the creation generally,” and “the existential perspective focuses on the law as revealed in man as God's image” (Frame, 75).

knowledge's three perspectives in theology capture what happens in counseling:

In counselling [*sic*] people with problems, we generally seek to ascertain three things: (1) What was the situation (the problem)? (2) How are you responding to it? (3) What does Scripture say? For the Christian, as we have seen, these questions are interdependent. The individual and the Scripture are part of the situation, the situation and the Scripture are parts of the person's experience, and an analysis of the situation and person help to show us what Scripture says (i.e., how it applies in this case).⁵⁸

When counseling happens, theology happens. It then follows that theology also occurs when the counselor (existential perspective) formulates how the Scriptures (normative perspective) drive that counseling (situational perspective).

BCers back to Adams have similarly understood God's Word and counseling. Adams, for example, declares, "All counseling, by its very nature (as it tries to explain and direct human beings in their living before God and before other human beings in a fallen world) implies theological commitments by the counselor."⁵⁹ He continues,

The relationship between counseling and theology is organic; counseling cannot be done apart from theological commitments. Every act, word (or lack of these) implies theological commitments. On the other hand, theological study leads to counseling implications. The attempt to separate the two must not be made; they cannot be separated without doing violence to both.⁶⁰

Lambert economically concurs: "Counseling is a theological discipline."⁶¹ For Powlison, counseling and the Scriptures share the common denominator of being practical theology.⁶² Other counselors have likewise contended for theology—the application of Scripture to all areas of life—as the way counselors intersect the world of the Bible with the world of people and their problems.⁶³

⁵⁸ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 74.

⁵⁹ Adams, *Theology*, 14.

⁶⁰ Adams, *Theology*, 15.

⁶¹ Lambert, *Theology*, 11.

⁶² David Powlison, "The Practical Theology of Counseling," *JBC* 25, no. 2 (2007): 2-3.

⁶³ Kellemen, "The Bible Is Relevant," 181; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 37-45; Viars and Green, "Sufficiency of Scripture," 103-05.

The Bible Establishes Counseling's Identity

In *Competent to Counsel*, Adams argued that the Scriptures establish his form of counseling, “nouthetic confrontation.” This approach, motivated by love, involves verbally addressing a problem or obstacle in a counselee’s life for the good of the counselee.⁶⁴ Adams drew from multiple passages to establish a biblical case for nouthetic counseling (e.g., 2 Sam 12; John 21; Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16, etc.).⁶⁵ He was particularly concerned to demonstrate nouthetic confrontation as a biblically warranted alternative to the approaches of secular psychology.⁶⁶

About Adams’s nouthetic confrontation, Ed Welch and David Powlison summarize, “‘Nouthetic’—loosely translated as ‘confront’ or ‘admonish’—highlighted the contrast between the lovingly interventive approach of Scripture and the then-popular nondirective model of Carl Rogers that dominated both secular and Christian circles.”⁶⁷ Welch and Powlison acknowledge the biblical warrant for Adams’s basic methodology by identifying it as “the lovingly interventive approach of Scripture,” especially in contrast to the Rogerian model then in-vogue with secular and Christian psychologists.

Later BCers, however, opted away from Adams’s “nouthetic” descriptor to characterize what became known as “biblical counseling.”⁶⁸ Though they discarded Adams’s choice term, BCers retained Adams’s strategy of proffering biblical and theological arguments to defend and explain what BC is. More than a few appeals have been made to passages such as Ephesians 4:15 to establish BC as one form of loving

⁶⁴ Adams, *Competent*, 44-50.

⁶⁵ Adams, *Competent*, 41ff.

⁶⁶ Adams, *Competent*, xi, xix, 41.

⁶⁷ Edward T. Welch and David Powlison, “‘Every Common Bush Afire With God’: The Scripture's Constitutive Role for Counseling,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 16, no. 4 (1997): 303.

⁶⁸ See Welch and Powlison, “Every Common Bush,” 304.

truth-speaking.⁶⁹ For Welch, BC is the union of two biblical ideas: “a hybrid of discipleship and biblical friendship.”⁷⁰ Lambert believes counseling and ministry are practically tautological: “The fact is that counseling is ministry, and ministry is counseling. The two are equivalent terms.”⁷¹ Observing the ministries of Jesus and his apostles (e.g., Acts 20:20), BCers also distinguish between the public ministry of the Word (e.g., preaching and teaching to a gathered group of people) and the private ministry of the Word (e.g., one-to-one or one-to-few ministry) and contend that counseling lies within the realm of the latter.⁷² In short, the Scriptures drive counseling

⁶⁹ Adams, *Competent*, 234; Powlison, *Seeing*, 4-5; Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 86, 160; Tripp, *Instruments*, 19; Rob Green and Steve Viars, “The Biblical Counseling Ministry of the Local Church,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 228-30; Jonathan Holmes and Lily Park, “Speaking the Truth in Love,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 263-75. These authors share the conviction that Paul’s phrase “speaking the truth in love” relates to BC, but they perceive the meaning and implication of this phrase differently. For example, Adams seems to take “truth” to mean “correspondence to reality” and “love” as a reference to the expression (e.g., word choice, tone, etc.) of that truth in appropriate ways. Describing his “conference table” concept, Adams states, “The conference table does not exist in order to tell others off. After each one handles his own failures, he raises other issues that have arisen during the day. He speaks the truth, but always in love (verse 15), and always with the intention of helping” (Adams, 234). Green and Viars, on the other hand, focus on the discerning and redemptive qualities of loving truth-speaking: “All too often there are churchgoers who take action according to unbiblical advice they hear from others. Counseling and counseling training helps to overcome people’s tendency to believe what they hear. It helps them to stand firm in the grace of Christ even in the midst of competing voices” (Green and Viars, 229). Holmes and Park, whose presentation centers around the phrase, equivocate. They connect Paul’s “truth” to his confessional assertion a few verses prior (Eph 4:4-6): “It is this truth that the believer is called to speak: truth that affirms, encourages, and sustains one another in body and spirit, in our faith, in our baptism, in our confession as believers in Jesus Christ” (Holmes and Park, 266). However, a few pages later they use the terms closer to a correspondence-manner reference similar to Adams’s use above. Writing about a meeting to address a personal conflict, Park says, “At the meeting, I shared my concerns about what had happened and a few Scripture verses that affected me (speaking the truth) and my motive to please God by seeking peace/unity (in love)” (Holmes and Park, 273). The usages in Powlison and Tripp are part of a larger portrait of personal word ministry that is redemptively rooted and oriented while also recognizing the importance of speaking truthful things in appropriate ways. For example, Powlison writes, “Ephesians 4:15 crystallizes two central actions: truth-speaking and loving. Of course, every other counseling methodology contains some analogy to or counterfeit of these. But Paul infuses loving conversation with its true contents and intentions: God-centered, Christ-centered, redemptive, and pastoral” (Powlison, *Seeing*, 4). He continues, “The wider context in Ephesians teaches and illustrates other ingredients in a comprehensive methodology of face-to-face ministry: radical dependency on God (1:16-19; 3:14-21); core attitudes of kindness toward others’ failings (4:2-3, 32); timeliness and appropriateness that arise from knowing people and their life-situations (4:29); [etc.]” (Powlison, *Seeing*, 4-5). Jones addresses concerns about ways Paul’s phrase is commonly co-opted in BC (and broader evangelicalism) in ways that subvert “Paul’s striking vision of each church member proclaiming to each other the gospel—what God has done, is doing, and will do in them and for them through Jesus Christ” (Robert Jones, “Biblically Accurate Biblical Counseling,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition* [Blog], May 21, 2014, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2014/05/21/biblically-accurate-biblical-counseling/>).

⁷⁰ Edward T. Welch, “What Is Biblical Counseling Anyway?” *JBC* 16, no. 1 (1997): 1.

⁷¹ Lambert, *After Adams*, 21.

⁷² Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 103-08; Kevin Carson, “The Personal, Private, and Public Ministry of the Word,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 257ff.; Kevin Carson and Paul

ministry by presenting counseling as one form of God-ordained, verbal ministry.

The Bible Identifies Counseling's Context

Counseling as a biblical ministry of one person to another leads naturally to the second area the Bible drives for counseling. The Scriptures identify the believing church as the primary context—the who and where—for counseling. Adams's first counseling title *Competent to Counsel* implies this conviction, and the book's thesis anticipates it: "The thesis of this book is that qualified Christian counselors properly trained in the Scriptures are competent to counsel—more competent than psychiatrists or anyone else."⁷³ While he values trained counselors, Adams does not contend for a special class of Christian counselors distinct from the rest of the church. Instead, from various passages (e.g., Rom 15:14; Col 3:16), he argues, "The New Testament assumes that all Christians, not simply ministers of the Gospel, should engage in [nouthetic activity]. . . . According to Paul, all Christians must teach and confront one another in a *nouthetic fashion*."⁷⁴

The Scriptures, according to Adams, invest all believers generally with a responsibility to counsel—to teach and confront one another nouthetically.⁷⁵ However, Adams is likewise adamant that God's Word particularly places a two-fold responsibility on pastors. First, from Ephesians 4:11, Adams understands counseling as a primary responsibility of pastors: "It is [a pastor's] task to minister the Word in preaching and counseling in such a way that weary, torn, hungry, wandering sheep are safely

Tautges, "Uniting the Public Ministry of the Word and the Private Ministry of the Word," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*, ed. by Robert W Kelleman and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 73. See also Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (1996; repr., Vancouver: Regent College, 2004), 60-61.

⁷³ Adams, *Competent*, 18.

⁷⁴ Adams, *Competent*, 41.

⁷⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1981), 1.

sequestered within the sheepfold.”⁷⁶ However, Adams does not advocate for pastors to counsel in isolation but admonishes pastors to train other elders “to help carry the load of counseling.”⁷⁷ Deacons also possess the opportunity to “have a great counseling ministry to the sick, the poor and the needy.”⁷⁸ Yet, participation should not be restricted these leaders. Adams exhorts pastors to “encourage general occasional counseling activity among all of the members of the flock.”⁷⁹ Also, pastors should train others in the congregation—especially leaders (e.g., youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, etc.)—to counsel so that “they may offer effective counsel that will preventively and remedially enable them to make significant contributions to the work of Christ.”⁸⁰ Adams’s subsequent *Ready to Restore* focuses on the calling and equipping of lay members to counsel: “God calls *every* Christian to counsel some people, somewhere, at some time about something, but He does not call him to counsel every person, under every situation, at all times about everything.”⁸¹ Consequently, “Because laymen who take the biblical commands to counsel seriously have such a far-reaching and important responsibility, they should study how to do so most effectively.”⁸²

BCers, following Adams’s basic trajectory, have continued to contend for the church as the primary context of counseling and counselor development. William Goode argues counseling is an integral part of the biblical vision for the church such that (1) the church is incomplete when counseling is absent and (2) counseling is deficient without

⁷⁶ Adams, *Manual*, 11-12. See also Adams, *Competent*, 42ff.; Adams, *Theology*, 276ff.

⁷⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 187, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Adams, *Shepherding*, 191.

⁷⁹ Adams, *Shepherding*, 190.

⁸⁰ Adams, *Shepherding*, 200.

⁸¹ Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 1.

⁸² Adams, *Ready to Restore*, 4.

the involvement of the church.⁸³ Applying Hebrews 3:12-13, Tripp contends, “The Hebrews passage clearly teaches that personal insight is the product of community. I need you in order to really see and know myself. . . . If I am going to see myself clearly, I need you to hold the mirror of God’s Word in front of me.”⁸⁴ In other words, all Christians need the loving counsel of other fellow Christ-followers to see and know themselves truly, including seeing and knowing where growth and change are needed. In this same vein, Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp devote an entire chapter—“Change Is a Community Project”—to the role of the body of Christ in the growth of individual believers.⁸⁵

Other BCers have written extensively about the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for the church to be the context in which counseling occurs.⁸⁶ The Biblical Counseling Coalition produced an entire volume of essays devoted to the relationship between BC and the church.⁸⁷ Lambert attends specifically to the mandate for pastors (or elders) both to engage in counseling and “lead the people in [their churches] to grow in the task of counseling.”⁸⁸ Similarly, Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju address pastors as both counselors and equippers of their congregation in discipling and counseling.⁸⁹ To aid pastors to these ends, Robert Kellemen authored both a guidebook for starting

⁸³ William W. Goode, “Biblical Counseling in the Local Church,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 222-26.

⁸⁴ Tripp, *Instruments*, 54; cf. 19-35.

⁸⁵ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 63-78.

⁸⁶ See Carson, “Personal, Private, and Public,” 257-70; Green and Viars, “Biblical Counseling Ministry,” 225-37; Higbee, “Practicality of the Bible,” 226-44; Powlison, *Seeing*, 5-6; Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 109-16; 127-32.

⁸⁷ Robert W. Kellemen and Kevin Carson, eds., *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

⁸⁸ Lambert, *Theology*, 306-09.

⁸⁹ Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

local-church counseling ministries⁹⁰ and a two-part curriculum for training counselors.⁹¹

BCers contend the Scriptures drive counseling by identifying the church—the pastor-led body of Christ—as the primary context for faithful counseling and training.

The Bible Guides Counselor’s Counsel

Thirdly, the Scriptures, as God’s Word, authoritatively drive counseling by giving divine guidance for how counselors counsel. Each way the Bible leads counseling influences how counselors counsel (the Scriptures coherently drive BC), but the present focus is how the Scriptures directly guide counselors and their counseling methods. The Scriptures train counselors by both direct instruction and example, as instances of *νουθετέω* demonstrate.⁹² Adams leaned on the verb *νουθετέω* and its cognates as a key cog in his argument for counseling as verbal instruction,⁹³ but Adams perceived that Scripture’s guidance to counselors extended beyond *νουθετέω*. He identifies counseling direction in Paul’s affirmations about the profitability of divinely-inspired Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.⁹⁴ In his follow-up to *Competent to Counsel*, Adams says that the passage’s four profits of Scripture—teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness—are “the four basic activities involved in biblical counseling.”⁹⁵ He would later look to these four profits as “a definitive process of change . . . taught in the Bible” and as forming “the process by which counselors may help people see progress in their

⁹⁰ Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011).

⁹¹ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

⁹² Instances of *νουθετέω* offer counseling guidance both by direct instruction (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:15) and example (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 1:28).

⁹³ Adams, *Competent*, 41ff.

⁹⁴ Adams, *Competent*, 51.

⁹⁵ Adams, *Manual*, 95.

lives.”⁹⁶ Adams identifies examples of nouthetic activity “in Nathan’s confronting David after his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, or Christ’s restoring Peter after his resurrection.”⁹⁷

Other BCers likewise perceive the Bible providing instruction for counselors, and some have organized their observations into biblically-rooted methodologies. Two proposals, in particular, reflect this theological systematization of the Bible’s methodological guidance for counselors: Wayne Mack’s “Eight I’s” and Paul Tripp’s “Love-Know-Speak-Do.”⁹⁸ Though both Mack and Tripp let Scripture drive their respective approaches, their instruction is not identical. Both men are committed to the authority, necessity, and sufficiency of Scripture for the task of BC.⁹⁹ Both ground their methodological instruction in God’s Word, but they offer two different, though overlapping, proposals.¹⁰⁰ Neither writer goes to the Bible’s chapter on counseling

⁹⁶ Adams, *How to Help People Change*, xiv. After the introductory section, Adams uses the four profits of 2 Timothy 3:16 to form that work’s primary structure.

⁹⁷ Adams, *Competent*, 46.

⁹⁸ In a series of seven essays, Mack proposes eight activities (each beginning with the letter “I”) in a counseling methodology drawn from assorted biblical observations: (1) involvement (i.e., building the counselor-counselee relationship), (2) instilling hope, (3) inventory (i.e., collecting relevant data about counselees), (4) interpreting collected data, (5) instruction, (6) inducement (i.e., motivating counselees to change), (7) implementation of instruction, and (8) integration (i.e., whole-life implementation of biblical principles). See Wayne A. Mack, “Developing a Helping Relationship with Counselees,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 101-13; “Instilling Hope in the Counselee,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 114-30; “Taking Counselee Inventory: Collecting Data,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 131-46; “Interpreting Counselee Data,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 147-61; “Providing Instruction through Biblical Counseling,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 162-75; “Biblical Counseling and Inducement” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 176-89; “Implementing Biblical Instruction,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 190-200.

Tripp, alternatively, puts forward a four-part approach—drawn from a far-reaching palette of passages—under the headings “Love,” “Know,” “Speak,” and “Do,” with multiple aspects under each element. Tripp, *Instruments*, 95-276. For another biblical counseling methodology, see Randy Patten and Mark Dutton, “The Central Elements of the Biblical Counseling Process,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 325-38.

⁹⁹ Wayne Mack, “The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (1998): 63-84; Tripp, *Instruments*, 17-55.

¹⁰⁰ For example, about data collection, Tripp cites the incarnation of Christ—“The Data Gatherer” (Heb 4:14-16)—while Mack employs the negative examples of Eli (1 Sam 1:12-14) and Job’s friends as those who would have benefited from additional data. Tripp, *Instruments*, 165-70; Mack, “Taking Counselee Inventory,” 131. On interpreting data. Tripp advises counselors to evaluate and organize data using four “hooks” for “knowing a person biblically,” while Mack commends ten questions to organize and interpret collected data. Tripp, *Instruments*, 187-94; Mack, “Interpreting Data”, 150-57.

methodology (since such a chapter is not present) and offers an overview or commentary on “the Bible’s approach to counseling.” Instead, both authors work out of their respective circumstances (i.e., Frame’s “situational perspective”) in order to ascertain biblical principles (i.e., “normative perspective”) for how counselors should approach counseling (i.e., “existential perspective”). Mack and Tripp demonstrate that the practical theology of BC results in variation. BCers do not share a label because they are univocal about all counseling theory and practice; they share the name because of their common concern to understand and put into practice how the Scriptures inform their counseling, including Scripture’s counsel on how to counsel.

The Bible Explains Counselees and Their Concerns

Next, God’s Word sufficiently drives counseling by offering direction in how counselors think about counselees and their problems. The Scriptures often address counseling concerns directly, but the Scriptures also provide a framework through which counselors understand counselees and counseling matters.

The Scriptures address the concerns of counselees. The Scriptures speak to and about the concerns of counselees. The psalmist expresses this conviction when he declares, “Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors” (Ps 119:24, ESV). Adams expressed a thoroughgoing confidence in the extent of Scripture’s treatment of counselees’ issues: “Just as the Christian counselor knows that there is no unique problem that has not been mentioned plainly in the Scriptures, so also he knows that there is a biblical solution to every problem.”¹⁰¹ In *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, Adams

¹⁰¹ Adams, *Manual*, 23.

seeks to show how the Scriptures address a range of counseling issues, including anger, depression, sexual problems, and fear.¹⁰²

Other BCers agree that the Scriptures address counselees and their concerns. Kevin Carson simply states, “*The Bible is about what life is about,*” and “the Bible is also about *what counseling is about.*”¹⁰³ With similar conviction, Welch reflects on Scripture’s attention to counselees’ simple and complex problems:

Given the degree to which God has revealed Himself and ourselves, we can assume that the Bible’s counsel speaks with great breadth, addressing the gamut of problems in living. It is certainly able to speak to the common problems we all encounter, such as relationship conflicts, financial pressures, our responses to physical health or illness, parenting questions, and loneliness. But it also speaks to distinctly modern problems such as depression, anxiety, mania, schizophrenia and attention deficit disorder, just to name a few.¹⁰⁴

The Bible provides a framework for understanding. While BCers agree the Scriptures address counseling concerns, they also acknowledge that the Scriptures do not deal with those concerns in an exhaustive, encyclopedic way. Adams articulates this conviction by declaring, “The Bible is not a catalog or encyclopedia of all possible problems with solutions attached to each.”¹⁰⁵ Welch and Powlison echo: “We do not believe that the Bible is a scrambled encyclopedia, a vast store of proof-texts on every subject, accessed and organized by a concordance.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, while BCers agree that God’s Word addresses counselees’ issues, Scripture’s method differs greatly from that of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.¹⁰⁷ Instead, counselors since

¹⁰² Adams, *Manual*, 348ff.

¹⁰³ Carson, “Richness and Relevance,” 29.

¹⁰⁴ Welch, “What Is Biblical Counseling,” 3.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, *Theology*, 122-23.

¹⁰⁶ Welch and Powlison, “Every Common Bush,” 309. See also Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 57-59; Tripp, *Instruments*, 9; Welch, “What is Biblical Counseling,” 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Adams have contended Scripture provides a lens through which to view, understand, and address counselees' problems as well as evaluate alternative attempts to do the same.¹⁰⁸

In *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, Adams insists, "The Scriptures are the primary and normative source from which the Christian counselor's presuppositions and principles must be drawn."¹⁰⁹ He recognizes counseling experience and "the dynamics of [the counselor's] own sinful heart" also provide perspective from "which he may make judgments, set goals, and project courses of action."¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Scriptures must be the judge by which heart dynamics and counseling experience are evaluated.¹¹¹

Biblically-supplied presuppositions and principles provide an evaluative grid by which counselors can examine those dynamics and experiences and apply them in counseling.

Counselors have transposed John Calvin's "Bible-as-spectacles" metaphor to illustrate how the Scriptures provide such a framework. Calvin analogically describes how the Scriptures allow sin-affected humanity to perceive God truly:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.¹¹²

For Calvin, the Scriptures provide order and clarity to otherwise distorted and confused knowledge and consciousness about God.

¹⁰⁸ BC is not unique in possessing a perspectival framework. Ernie Baker and Howard Eyrich argue, "Counseling systems, by their very nature, are really philosophical systems" (Ernie Baker and Howard Eyrich, "Caution: Counseling Systems Are Belief Systems," in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 161). See also Adams, *Competent*, xviii; Adams, *Theology*, 196; Lambert, "Sufficiency of Scripture," 23; Powlison, *Seeing*, 201-09, 239-51; Street, "Why Biblical Counseling," 31-47; Welch and Powlison, "Every Common Bush," 310; John MacArthur, "Rediscovering Biblical Counseling," in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 6-17.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *Manual*, 21.

¹¹⁰ Adams, *Manual*, 21.

¹¹¹ Adams, *Manual*, 21-22n2.

¹¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1960; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1.6.1.

The Scriptures function similarly with respect to counseling's subject matter: they are the means by which divine order and clarity come to otherwise distorted and confused knowledge about life and life's problems (e.g., Adams's counseling experiences and heart dynamics). To Calvin's metaphor, Welch and Powlison add, "[The Scriptures] allow us to see through, to see from above, or to see from within. With Scripture, we see with the mind of Christ; we see with the gaze of the Searcher of hearts."¹¹³ In like manner, other counselors have employed a similar adapted metaphor to conceptualize how the Scriptures offer a lens through which to approach counseling and counsees.¹¹⁴

This conviction is consistent with the above assertions of Adams, Lambert, and others that counseling is fundamentally theological. Consequently, both Adams and Lambert consider the framework provided to counseling by systematic theology.¹¹⁵ This approach benefits from the theological and philosophical insights of other exegetes and scholars who share common convictions about the character and authority of the Bible. The intimate relationship between theology and hermeneutics notwithstanding,¹¹⁶ this approach—direct interaction between systematized doctrines and counseling theory and practice—has not been the only strategy, however, by which BC has grappled with the perspective-shaping influence the Scriptures have for counseling. Counselors have especially utilized prominent biblical themes, beginning with Christ and his gospel, to delineate the details of Scripture's perspectival framework for counseling.

The framework's priority: Christ and his gospel. Starting with Adams, counselors have prioritized Christ and his gospel among the Bible's organizing principles

¹¹³ Welch and Powlison, "Every Common Bush," 305.

¹¹⁴ Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 60; Street, "Why Biblical Counseling," 40.

¹¹⁵ Adams, *Theology*; Lambert, *Theology*.

¹¹⁶ See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 9-10.

for comprehending counseling and personal change. For Adams, biblical change occurs in two stages. The first stage is instantaneous at conversion: “The *regeneration* (or life-giving transformation that opens the heart to the gospel) is an instantaneous, unmerited change . . . of the whole inner life, disposing a sinner toward God for the first time.”¹¹⁷ The second stage, however, is gradual: “Transformation continues throughout the entire course of the Christian’s earthly life. This *process* of transformation by which a previously sinfully disposed and habituated life turns into one that please God more and more by conformity to his directive will . . . is called *sanctification*.”¹¹⁸ Concerning critiques of Adams’s appropriation of the gospel for counseling, Lambert laments, “Some accuse Adams of being less committed to a gospel-saturated approach than those in the second generation of biblical counseling.”¹¹⁹ Celebrating the pride of place Adams reserved for the gospel, Lambert retorts, “Adams was gospel-centered. In fact, if we’re going to give credit where it is due, he was the first authentically gospel-centered counselor in over one hundred years.”¹²⁰

BCers following Adams reserve the same importance in counseling for Christ and his good news. Welch and Powlison extend the “Bible-as-spectacles” metaphor to emphasize the importance to counseling of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel:

Biblical counseling typically takes the metaphor of Bible-as-spectacles one step further: just as Scripture is the spectacles through which we truly see, so Christ is the sun by which we see. This metaphor communicates not correction of vision, but it establishes the very conditions for seeing truly. Scripture, the Word of Christ, is both light and corrective lens by which seeing—and counseling ministry—

¹¹⁷ Adams, *Theology*, 36.

¹¹⁸ Adams, *Theology*, 36. For critiques of Adams’s treatment of “habituation,” see George M. Schwab, “Critique of ‘Habituation’ as a Biblical Model of Change,” *JBC* 21, no. 2 (2003): 67-83; Edward T. Welch, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adams’s View of the Flesh and an Alternative,” *JBC* 20, no. 3 (2002):16–25.

¹¹⁹ Lambert, *After Adams*, 121. Lambert distinguishes between “a first generation [of biblical counseling] led by Jay Adams to a second generation characterized by more contemporary leadership [including Mack, Powlison, Tripp, and Welch]” (Lambert, *After Adams*, 121).

¹²⁰ Lambert, *After Adams*, 121. For other examples of the value Adams places on the gospel and its effects for counseling, see Adams, *Theology*, 174-83.

occurs.¹²¹

Similarly, Pierre prioritizes the role of the gospel of Christ conveyed by Scripture to shape both counseling's framework and priorities. He claims, "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."¹²² According to Pierre, Scripture is adequate to give counselors a frame of reference through which to understand human experience, and central to that experience is God's intention for his image-bearers to reflect his image through the gospel of Christ. He again stresses the centrality of the gospel to the biblical framework through which human experience in this life should be understood: "The gospel of Jesus Christ is the interpretive center of Scripture, and a person's relation to that gospel is the primary concern of the Bible's psychology."¹²³

Jones affirms the primacy of the gospel for counseling's perspective in two implications that follow from the Bible creating and propelling the BC approach: "Our counseling will reflect the Bible's central theme—the redemptive work in Jesus Christ. And it will reflect the Bible's central ministry vision—to bring Jesus to needy people and to help them know, love, and follow him."¹²⁴ As counselors do theology, their main focus should resonate with the Bible's main focus—God's redeeming love in Christ. With this same conviction, Kellemen rejects a "Bible-as-textbook" perspective and instead exhorts counselors to prioritize the gospel in how they view and use the Scriptures for counseling: "If we *view* and *use* the Bible as the story—the gospel-centered drama—of the battle to win our hearts, then our one-another ministry comes alive."¹²⁵

¹²¹ Welch and Powlison, "Every Common Bush," 305.

¹²² Pierre, "Scripture is Sufficient," 105.

¹²³ Pierre, "Scripture is Sufficient," 106.

¹²⁴ Jones, "Christ-Centeredness," 109.

¹²⁵ Kellemen, "The Bible Is Relevant," 181; cf. 194-96. See also Lambert, *Theology*, 136-57, 274-303; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 112-21, 144-46; Douglas Bookman, "The Godward Focus of

Other key aspects of the framework. Influenced by the gospel's priority, counselors have described diverse aspects of the framework Scripture offers for counseling. Consonant with the gospel's significance, Adams calls for God to be the beginning and the center of BC's perspective: "Biblical counseling will recognize God as the giver of its principles (and even of many of its methods). It will, therefore, be a God-oriented system derived from his revelation about the world, man and himself."¹²⁶

Mack, Powlison, and others advocate the use of biblical language to describe counselees, their afflictions, and their shortcomings in this fallen world.¹²⁷ In particular, counselors have stressed the importance of the categories of sin and suffering for counseling's framework. Lambert suggests that Adams was largely one-sided on these two issues, focusing primarily on a counselee's sin.¹²⁸ However, Lambert argues that these areas are among those in which counselors after Adams advanced upon his work:

One of the main areas of advancement for the biblical counseling movement has been the degree to which a counselor should deal with counselees according to their sin, according to their suffering, or some combination. The model that Jay Adams developed included a heavy emphasis on confronting sin patterns observed in counseling. While the second generation has not abandoned the need to confront sin, it has sought to advance the movement by seeing the counselee in a more nuanced way as both a sinner and a sufferer.¹²⁹

As an example of this advance, Lambert elsewhere contends that the Bible "allows us to

Biblical Counseling" in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 60-63; Robert Cheong, "The Centrality of the Gospel," in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 153-65; Nicolas Ellen and Jeremy Lelek, "The Hope of Eternity," in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 216-17; Michael R. Emler, *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 44-51, Kindle; Lee Lewis and Michael Snetzer, "The Pursuit of Holiness," in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 183-85; David Powlison, "Biblical Counseling in Recent Times" in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 28; Stuart Scott, "The Gospel in Balance," in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 167-79.

¹²⁶ Adams, *Theology*, 47. See also Bookman, "Godward Focus," 51-56; Lambert, *Theology*, 102-35; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 82-106; Powlison, *Seeing*, 35-58.

¹²⁷ Mack, "Interpreting Data," 150-55; Powlison, *Seeing*, 146-62. See also Kellemen, "The Bible Is Relevant," 186-93; Lambert, "Sufficiency of Scripture," 19; Marshall and Mary Asher, *The Christian's Guide to Psychological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2014); Robert W. Kellemen, "The Rich Relevance of God's Word," in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 213-14.

¹²⁸ Lambert, *After Adams*, 50ff. For examples of the emphasis Adams placed on sin, see Adams, *Competent*, 105-27; Adams, *Manual*, 117-40; Adams, *Theology*, 139-59.

¹²⁹ Lambert, *After Adams*, 49-50.

be fairly specific about various kinds of suffering we experience in a world plagued by sin.”¹³⁰ He distills this specificity in six categories of suffering that counselee’s can experience.¹³¹ Jones proposes a five-fold taxonomy of suffering.¹³² Elsewhere, Lambert notes the desire of both Mack and Tripp for counselors “to engage the counselee as a fellow sinner and sufferer in need of mutual grace.”¹³³

On the necessity of retaining an important place for sin in counseling’s framework, Robert Jones and Brad Hambrick remind, “In any field, accurate treatment requires accurate diagnosis, and accurate diagnosis requires knowing what to look for and why.”¹³⁴ Connecting the diagnosis-treatment thread with sin for BC, they continue,

For the biblical counselor, accurately understanding people and their problems begins with assessing them through the lens of God’s Word. The Bible’s answer is simple yet profound: the root cause is sin. Adam and Eve’s disobedience at the Fall in Genesis 3 set in motion a deadly dynamic that has produced immeasurable personal, social, and natural devastation.¹³⁵

Jones and Hambrick then explore “eight functional distinctions about sin that will help us wisely minister to people.”¹³⁶

Another key component in counseling’s framework connects to the complex intersection of suffering and sin: a biblical anthropology, and especially a faithful

¹³⁰ Lambert, *Theology*, 248.

¹³¹ Lambert, *Theology*, 248-55.

¹³² Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H Academic, forthcoming), chap. 10.

¹³³ Lambert, *After Adams*, 96-97. See also Emler, *CrossTalk*, 74-82; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 106-11, 153-60; Mack, “Helping Relationship,” 105; Powlison, *Speaking Truth*, 11-31; Tripp, *Instruments*, 146-47; David Powlison, “The God of All Comfort,” *JBC* 31, no. 3 (2017), 2-7.

¹³⁴ Robert Jones and Brad Hambrick, “The Problem of Sin,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 139.

¹³⁵ Jones and Hambrick, “Problem of Sin,” 139.

¹³⁶ Jones and Hambrick, “Problem of Sin,” 140-50. See also Bookman, “Godward Focus,” 54-60; Cheong, “Centrality of the Gospel,” 159; Ellen and Lelek, “Hope of Eternity,” 214-16; Emler, *CrossTalk*, 74-82; Lambert, *Theology*, 214-46; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 132-36, 150-51; Lewis and Snetzer, “Pursuit of Holiness,” 184-85; Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” 28; Tautges and Viars, “Sufficient for Life,” 52, 54, 57-58; John MacArthur, “Counseling and the Sinfulness of Humanity,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 64-78.

theology of the human heart.¹³⁷ Once again, Lambert discerns advancement in this area following Adams: “Missing in Adams’s model was an elaboration of all that was included in the idea of heart motivation. It is this important work of elaboration that the recent leadership in the biblical counseling movement has tried to accomplish.”¹³⁸ Tripp elsewhere observes, “The Bible uses ‘heart’ to describe the inner person,” and he continues, “The heart is the ‘real’ you. It is the essential core of who you are.”¹³⁹ Then he centers on the significance of the biblical depiction of the heart for counseling: “Because the Bible says your heart is the essential you, any ministry of change must target the heart.”¹⁴⁰ To this end, Pierre’s *Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* explores the operations of the heart within the context of human experience in order to inform counseling practice.¹⁴¹

Additionally, the Scriptures set the goals and priorities for counseling when attending to counselee’s heart-level responses in the midst of sin and suffering. Adams looks to 1 Timothy 1:5 as a statement of BC’s goals “to foster the love toward God and love toward one’s neighbor which God commands.”¹⁴² Elsewhere, Adams submits that the purpose of counseling is “to honor [God] and bring counselees into a deeper relationship with him.”¹⁴³ Accordingly, Robert Cheong and Heath Lambert insist that BC adopts the Scripture’s priority of spiritual formation: “Any counseling that does not

¹³⁷ Jeff Forrey and Jim Newheiser, “The Influences on the Human Heart,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 123-37; Robert W. Kellemen and Sam Williams, “The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 107-21.

¹³⁸ Lambert, *After Adams*, 74-75.

¹³⁹ Tripp, *Instruments*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Tripp, *Instruments*, 60.

¹⁴¹ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016). See also Lambert, *Theology*, 194-204; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 136-52; Powlison, *Seeing*, 145-62; Viars and Green, “Sufficiency of Scripture,” 94-97; Howard Eyrich and Elyse Fitzpatrick, “The Diagnoses and Treatment of Idols of the Heart,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 339-50; Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2016), Kindle.

¹⁴² Adams, *Competent*, 54.

¹⁴³ Adams, *Theology*, 47.

pursue spiritual formation through an intimate relationship with Jesus by faith as one of its chief goals is not worthy to be called *biblical* counseling.”¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Pierre contends that the Scriptures establish the primary themes that should organize our conception of human experience in creation: “Scripture is sufficient for *framing the priority of attention regarding the human experience as occurring covenantally before God.*”¹⁴⁵ Among other things, the Gospels portray life covenantally before God without sin in the incarnation of Christ. In light of 1 John 2:5-6, Jones contends that the life of Jesus described in the NT “provides the perfect standard for how our counselees should live.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the Scriptures identify the purpose of life—“to glorify God through imitating Jesus”—and God’s plan to conform his children into the image of his Son: “Christlikeness is the goal.”¹⁴⁷ Christlikeness in a fallen world is the goal Scripture establishes for BC.¹⁴⁸

Following the lead of their mentor Powlison, Lane and Tripp bring the above themes—the gospel, sin, suffering, the human heart, and the goal of Christ-like transformation—together into a holistic framework in *How People Change*. In short, their “Three-Trees Model” of change organizes the Bible’s teaching concerning “what life in this fallen world is like, who we are as fallen human beings, who [God] is as Savior and Lord of all things, [and] how he progressively transforms us by his grace.”¹⁴⁹ Adapting the imagery of Jeremiah 17:5-10, their model consists of four elements—heat, thorns, cross, and fruit—that encapsulate “the change process that God institutes in the lives of

¹⁴⁴ Robert Cheong and Heath Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 287.

¹⁴⁵ Pierre, “Scripture is Sufficient,” 100.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, “Christ-Centeredness,” 113.

¹⁴⁷ Carson, “Richness and Relevance,” 33.

¹⁴⁸ See also Cheong, “Centrality of the Gospel,” 158.

¹⁴⁹ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 82. Jones also credits Powlison in Jones’s own adaptation of this same framework. See Jones, Kellen, and Green, *Gospel for Disordered Lives*, chap. 10.

his children.”¹⁵⁰ The heat corresponds to “the person’s situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings, and temptations” (i.e., predominately their suffering).¹⁵¹ The thorns refer to “the person’s ungodly responses to the situation. It includes behavior, the heart driving the behavior, and the consequences that result” (i.e., their sin).¹⁵² The cross represents “the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change” (i.e., Christ and his gospel).¹⁵³ The fruit denotes “the person’s new godly response to the situation resulting from God’s power at work in the heart. It includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the harvest of consequences that follow” (i.e., the goals and priorities of BC).¹⁵⁴

This perspectival framework equips counselors to attend to specific manifestations of suffering and sin in the counselee’s life and to guide the counselee to draw upon God’s provisions in Christ so that the counselee might grow in Christlikeness (i.e., “progressive sanctification”) whether the suffering subsides or remains.¹⁵⁵ Working from this grid, counselors can “engage the particulars of numerous and complex problems.”¹⁵⁶ Powlison captures the capacity of ancient Scripture to equip twenty-first century counselors in this way:

Our Father teaches us the common themes threading through all of life. Wisdom. A feel for how life breaks, a skilled engagement. . . . In the economy of God’s instruction, things that he said and did with desert shepherds in the ancient Middle East proved directly instructive and encouraging to urban Greco-Romans one or two thousand years later (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11) and prove the same for us today, yet another couple thousand years along. Wildly different circumstances are

¹⁵⁰ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 81.

¹⁵¹ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

¹⁵² Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

¹⁵³ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

¹⁵⁴ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83-85.

¹⁵⁵ See Adams, *Theology*, 36, 233-75; Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 156-64; Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” 28; Welch and Powlison, “Every Common Bush,” 320.

¹⁵⁶ Lambert, “Sufficiency of Scripture,” 23.

not fatal to significance and relevance. There is no temptation that is not common to all (1 Cor 10:13), yet no situations or persons are identical. The merciful Father comforted Paul in *his* troubles, making him able to comfort those facing *any* trouble (1 Cor. 1:4) [*sic*], including you in *your* troubles, so that you also can help those in *any* trouble. This dynamic of the living and omni-adaptable Word creates one of the many deep joys of Christian faith. It also makes you game to tackle any problem, however unfamiliar, dark, and contorted. That's basic: God speaks to real people.¹⁵⁷

In other words, the Scriptures drive counseling by offering a comprehensive framework out of which counselors can comprehend human experience in a fallen world and wisely counsel counselees.

The Bible Steers Counseling's Hope, Motivation, and Change

BCers have also identified other important means by which the Scriptures direct counseling, especially in cooperation with counselors' use of their framework to apply the Bible to the lives of their counselees. First, the Bible instills hope and confidence for change. Adams first emphasized the hope the Scriptures provide that true change is possible.¹⁵⁸ Biblically-based hope is a confidence in God and his on-going work communicated in his Word.¹⁵⁹ However, such confidence is not restricted to a this-life focus. God's Word provides an enduring hope by pointing to eternal transformation that will come when Jesus returns (1 Cor 15:42-49; 1 John 3:2).¹⁶⁰

Second, in addition to instilling hope for change, the Bible supplies motivation for change. Again, Adams led the way for BCers. In particular, Adams draws on the indicative-imperative pattern of Paul's argument in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians.¹⁶¹ Other counselors since Adams have likewise acknowledged this pattern—

¹⁵⁷ David Powlison, "Is the Adonis Complex in Your Bible?" *JBC* 22, no. 2 (2004): 43.

¹⁵⁸ Adams, *Competent*, 137-44; Adams, *Manual*, 39-48.

¹⁵⁹ Cheong, "Centrality of the Gospel," 162-63. See also Jeremy Lelek, "Relating Truth to Life: Gospel-Centered Counseling for Depression," in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 306-11.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, "Christ-Centeredness," 122-24. See also Ellen and Lelek, "Hope of Eternity," 209-22; Viars and Green, "Sufficiency of Scripture," 97-98.

¹⁶¹ Adams, *Manual*, 162. Recognizing the significance of this basic pattern was not original to Adams. William Dennison observes that Hermann Jacoby, in his late 19th century *Neutestamentliche Ethik*, "stated that the imperative is used by Paul as exhortation for man to accomplish in fact what God's grace

“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (Eph 4:1) and the theological realities undergirding it—as a primary source of motivation for BC.¹⁶² Jones points to not only the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection (i.e., redemption applied) but also the historical fact of Christ’s crucifixion and victory over death (i.e., redemption accomplished) as motivations in counseling (2 Cor 5:14-15). He observes, “Christ-centered biblical counselors direct their counselees to live for [Christ]—to grow and change in practical ways—for a very specific reason: because God in love has sent his own Son to die and be raised for them.”¹⁶³

Third, holy writ furnishes resources and methods for change. BCers have celebrated the presence and work of the Holy Spirit as the primary, biblically-attested empowerment for God-honoring change.¹⁶⁴ The Scriptures also provide a variety of means through which the Spirit works to bring change. Jeremy Lelek surveyed BC literature and identified no less than twenty-eight distinct methods BC authors have derived from Scripture to encourage and strive for change in the lives of their counselees.¹⁶⁵ Some of those methods (e.g., “instilling hope centered in the gospel of

had accomplished in principle (indicative). He wrote that Paul viewed the new life in Christ as a work of God and man, grounded in what God does (indicative), brought about by what man does when guided by the Spirit (imperative)” (William D. Dennison, “Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics,” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 14, no. 1 [1979]: 58). See also Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 77-85, Kindle; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 536-37; Michael Parsons, “Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul’s Writing,” in *Understanding Paul’s Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches*, ed. Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 217-47; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 656-58.

¹⁶² Carson, “Richness and Relevance,” 37-39; Jones, “Christ-Centeredness,” 120; Scott, “Gospel in Balance,” 167-79; Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹⁶³ Jones, “Christ-Centeredness,” 117.

¹⁶⁴ Adams, *Competent*, 20-25; Adams, *Manual*, 5-8; Adams, *Theology*, 249-62; Jones, “Christ-Centeredness,” 120-22; Lambert, *Theology*, 158-79; Lewis and Snetzer, “Pursuit of Holiness,” 184; Justin Holcomb and Mike Wilkerson, “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 59-60; Heath Lambert, “Using the Epistles in the Personal Ministry of the Word,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 375-77; John MacArthur, “The Work of the Spirit and Biblical Counseling,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 79-87.

¹⁶⁵ Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 182-190.

Jesus,” “exercising sensitivity and flexibility,” etc.) focus on the counselor’s responsibilities. However, a number of his methods also translate into biblically-based action items (e.g., “helping counselees develop a structured or disciplined way of life,” “radical amputating,” “praying,” “reading and studying the Bible,” etc.) for counselees to employ for growth and change.

Conclusion

On the basis of what Scripture is—God’s divinely-inspired, inerrant, authoritative, necessary, sufficient, transformative Word—BCers believe faithful counseling must be driven by Scripture. For counseling, Scripture drives by suppling a wealth of resources—the church, guidance, a framework, hope, motivation, and methods for change. Given these resources supplied by Scripture to counseling, the next chapter begins to explore how to read and apply the Scriptures—with particular emphasis on the Gospels—with an awareness of counseling as a key area in which the Scriptures are to be applied.

CHAPTER 3
READING AND UNDERSTANDING
THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

To counsel well counselors must read and apply the Scriptures well. The previous chapter explored the “why” and “what” of the Scriptures’ drive of biblical counseling. The present and following chapters narrow to consider how the Gospels—particularly the Gospel of Matthew—contribute to counseling. This chapter and the next pair together: the present chapter focuses on how to read and understand Matthew’s Gospel, while the next chapter examines how to apply the book to counseling. Reading and counseling well from the Gospel of Matthew begins with a recognition of what counselors should expect to find in the Gospel and how it communicates, preparing counselors to read Matthew’s Gospel carefully, contextually, and holistically.

The Lay of Matthew’s Land

Both Kevin Vanhoozer and Jonathan Pennington compare literary genres and their conveyance of truth to different kinds of maps: “Think of the various biblical genres—prophecy, apocalyptic, hymn, narrative, law, etc.—as different kinds of maps. Each map highlight certain features of the world more than others and accomplishes different tasks.”¹ In this analogy, all four evangelists, as cartographers, drew the same kind of maps (i.e., a Gospel) of Jesus’s life with each map sharing some basic features but also possessing distinctives. An orientation to Matthew’s map—especially what

¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 343; cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 295-97; Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 45-46.

Matthew’s Gospel contains and how it richly communicates—positions counselors to grow in their reading, understanding, and application of the Gospel.

What Counselors Find in the Gospel of Matthew

Ascertaining Matthew’s Gospel map overlaps with a question NT scholars have debated for the past century: “What are the Gospels?”² Descriptively, Matthew’s Gospel, as part of the fourfold Gospel witness, is a diverse but unified authoritative story about Jesus that interweaves history, literature, and theology and possesses consequential resemblances to antecedent forms of literature.³

Characteristics of diverse unity. Unity and diversity mark all the Gospels: “The Gospels exhibit both unity and diversity, bearing witness to the same Jesus (unity) but viewing him from unique perspectives (diversity).”⁴ The Gospels tell narrative accounts of Jesus’s life and ministry, meaning the Gospels are first about Jesus: “The gospels [*sic*] are Christology in narrative form, or less technically, the story of Jesus.”⁵ The unity of the Gospels lies in their common center, Jesus. This Christo-centric orientation assists counselors in retaining a similar focus on Christ in their counseling thereby leading counselees to consider themselves and their concerns first in relation to Jesus.⁶

² Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 22.

³ The term “fourfold Gospel” comes from Pennington who attributes it to Irenaeus. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 9n18.

⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 24.

⁵ Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?: A Symbolic Reading*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 8, cf. Rob Green, “Using the Gospels in the Personal Ministry of the Word,” in *SC*, ed. Robert W. Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 355. See also Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 3rd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 190-91, 216-17; Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 374.

⁶ Though not concerned exclusively with the Gospels, Robert Jones discusses the Christ-centeredness of biblical counseling and especially five ways counselors can strive for Christ-driven

Beyond their Christ-focused unity, the Gospels also reflect a two-fold diversity: within each book (i.e., “vertically”) and across the fourfold Gospel (i.e., “horizontally”).⁷ Matthew’s vertical diversity, like the other evangelists, shows up in his varied array of smaller literary units—parables, speeches, various types of short stories (e.g., miracle stories, pronouncement stories), etc.—used to recount Jesus’s life and ministry.⁸ Scholars (particularly form critics) lack unanimity on quantifying and labeling the various literary forms within the Gospels, nevertheless they concur that each Gospel contains this diversity.⁹ Reading and understanding Matthew with a goal of employing the book in counseling must take into account this vertical variation in the Gospel.

Not only is Matthew’s Gospel rich with vertical variety, but it also manifests macro- and micro-level horizontal diversity when compared with its three literary siblings. At the macro-level, the most apparent variation between the four Gospels exists between the three Synoptics and the Gospel of John.¹⁰ However, considerable differences are observable when comparing Matthew with Mark and Luke, both in what they recount and the order of their retellings. For example, variety appears quickly when comparing

counseling. Robert Jones, “The Christ-Centeredness of Biblical Counseling,” in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 109-25.

⁷ On reading the Gospels “vertically” and “horizontally,” see Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 59, 149-50, 193-94; Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 32-35; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 140-46; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Dallas: Word, 1993), 514-18, Logos Bible Software; Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 193-208; and Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 376, 385-86.

⁸ Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 15; Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 378-82; James L. Bailey, “Genre Analysis,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 150-51, Logos Bible Software; Craig L. Blomberg, “Form Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 243-44.

⁹ Blomberg, “Form Criticism,” 243.

¹⁰ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 55.

the contents of Matthew 8-9 with parallel pericopes in Mark and Luke.¹¹ The content and order of presentation differ, and micro-level diversity at the pericope level appears in details included and excluded, as well as word choice and sentence structure.¹² The horizontal diversity among the four evangelists points to different priorities and discernable emphases in each author's writing. This variety coupled with the unity of the Gospels creates a "complementary univocality" that should motivate counselors to consider the unique counseling contributions of each evangelist.¹³

Contents of history, literature, and theology. In addition to Jesus's centrality, Matthew's Gospel shares with the other Gospels its nature as a tightly woven cord of three inseparable strands: history, literature, and theology.¹⁴ The theology of Jesus and Matthew is a primary way Matthew contributes to the Scripture's drive of counseling. However, the Gospel's theology cannot be separated from its recounting of historical people and events, as well as the literary forms used.¹⁵ Reading and applying the Gospel of Matthew in counseling must account for its tri-stranded nature.

The history strand weaves thickly through Matthew by three threads.¹⁶ The

¹¹ See the comparative table in Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 84-85.

¹² While examples could be multiplied, consider a few observations comparing Matthew's first account—Jesus's cleansing of the leper (8:1-4)—with the parallel accounts in Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-16. In all three accounts, the leper confesses Jesus's ability to cleanse him so long as Jesus is willing (Matt 8:2; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12). Matthew aligns with Luke in having the leper address Jesus as "Lord" (Κύριε; Matt 8:2; Luke 5:12); Mark omits the vocative. Alternatively, Matthew and Mark (but not Luke) narrate the leper's cleansing at his healing (Matt 8:3; Mark 1:42). Both Mark and Luke (but not Matthew) state the leprosy left the man at his healing (Mark 1:42; Luke 5:13). According to Matthew, Jesus instructed the healed man to offer the gift (τὸ δῶρον) Moses commanded as a proof (Matt 8:4), and Mark and Luke add Jesus's indication that what was offered was for the man's cleansing (Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14).

¹³ For "complementary univocality," see Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 73.

¹⁴ Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 371. See also Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 27-29; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 67-68.

¹⁵ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 281-85.

¹⁶ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 27. See Pennington's survey of the history of historical writing and reading, especially concerning history and the Gospels. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 78-94.

first, most apparent, and most important historical thread is the history to which Matthew reliably bears witness.¹⁷ The second historical thread is the larger historical, geographical, and cultural context of Jesus's life and ministry, a context with fingerprints throughout the Gospel.¹⁸ The third historical thread concerns the history of each Gospel's production, including sources each evangelist may have used when writing, the history of those sources, and the concerns each evangelist sought to address through his writing.¹⁹ Such considerations impact the reading and application of the Gospels in so far as they draw attention to the presence of emphases and priorities reflected in each evangelist's composition. Ultimately, when considering history and the Gospels, the history the Gospels narrate and their narration of that history deserve priority attention.²⁰ Counselors cannot bypass this historical thread when they enter the world Matthew's Gospel.

Like the strand of history, the Gospel's literary strand also possesses multiple threads. One thread is the previously noted vertical diversity (i.e., the wide range of

¹⁷ See Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007); F. F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (1943; repr., Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011); and Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). On the Gospels as built on historically reliable, eyewitness testimony, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), Kindle; cf. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 146.

¹⁸ Hermeneuticians regularly admit the influence of these historical traits on the reading and understanding the Gospels. Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 68, 579-80. See also Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 30-31, 135-38; J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115-36; Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 144-49; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: 2006), 37-39; Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1991), 76-97.

¹⁹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 138-39; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 201-02. For discussions about source, form, and rhetorical critical approaches to the Gospels, see Blomberg, "Form Criticism," 243-250; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 171-91; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2005), 77-112; as well as essays on form, source, and redaction criticism in David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001). For a discussion of divergent evangelical attitudes towards these critical approaches, see Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42, no. 2 (1999): 193-210.

²⁰ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 150.

literary subgenres in the Gospels). Two other literary threads in all the Gospels derive from the Gospels' narrative form: the story thread and the discourse thread.²¹ As the Gospels communicate about Jesus, they do so with narrative as “the organizing framework within which the sayings and discourses are arranged.”²² The Gospels' story thread concerns the basic details of each Gospel's overarching story and contains essential narrative elements: characters, a plot and events to develop the characters and story, conflict, and a climax of success or failure.²³ The Gospels' discourse thread, on the other hand, concerns “how the story is told.”²⁴ This thread includes aspects such as the point of view of the storyteller, narration, structural patterns used to organize the story, and the Gospels' episodic nature.²⁵ The evangelists arrange their episodes in “acts and cycles,” which give structure to the overall plot.²⁶ Rather than disposable containers of historical and theological facts, the Gospels are the structured works of literary artists.²⁷ In order to ascertain the fullness of Matthew's contributions for counseling, counselors must account for this literary thread as they engage the Gospel of Matthew.

The Gospels' final dominant strand—theology—also consists of multiple (though not entirely separable) threads. The first theological thread is the theology of

²¹ Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), chap. 3, Kindle; cf. Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 157.

²² Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 373.

²³ Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 19; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, chap. 3, sec. 1, para. 2. See also Edgar V. McKnight, “Literary Criticism,” in Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 479-80.

²⁴ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, chap. 3, sec. 1, para. 2.

²⁵ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, chap. 3. On the Gospels' episodic nature, see Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 373; cf. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 185-86. The use of independent episodes is replaced in the passion narratives near the end of each Gospel. Loveday Alexander, “What Is a Gospel?,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, Cambridge Companions to Religion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.

²⁶ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 186. Pennington gives credit for the terms “acts” and “cycles” to J. P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 156.

²⁷ Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 18; Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 372-73.

Jesus, especially his kingdom theology.²⁸ The second theological thread is the theology of the individual evangelists. The theological unity of the fourfold Gospel witness holds together, in no small part, because of the influence of Jesus's theology on each Gospel writer. Nonetheless, diversity emerges in the unique theological emphases of each writer, a dynamic captured in Mark Strauss's summary of each evangelist's portrayal of Jesus:

At the risk of oversimplifying, we may say that Matthew presents Jesus as the *Jewish Messiah*, the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes; Mark portrays him as the *suffering Son of God*, who offers himself as a sacrifice for sins; Luke's Jesus is the *Savior for all people*, who brings salvation to all nations and people groups; and in John, Jesus is the *eternal Son of God*, the self-revelation of God the Father.²⁹

A third theological thread consists of the theology of other characters. Some characters' theology in Matthew coheres with that of Jesus and the writers, as is often the case with John the Baptist (Matt 3:11-15; cf. John 1:26-27, 29-34).³⁰ In other instances, the beliefs of Jesus's opponents serve as a foil to reinforce Jesus's beliefs and teachings (Matt 5:20ff.; 12:1ff.; 22:15ff.). The final theological thread—OT theological categories

²⁸ Jesus's statements reported in Matthew's Gospel reflect Jesus's theology. He communicated truth about God (5:45-48; 6:4, 6, 8-15, 26, 30-32; 7:7-11). He evidences convictions about Scripture (4:4, 7, 10; 22:31-32; 23:43-44), his relationship to them (5:17), and his reading as their true and faithful interpretation (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32). Jesus expresses anthropological beliefs (11:29; 12:33-35; 23:27-28). He teaches eschatology (8:10-12; 13:24-30, 36-43; 22:29-32; 24:2-25:46). His statements (8:3; 9:2; 11:25-27; 22:41-46; 28:18) and refusal to squelch the worship of others (14:33; 21:15-16) communicate a christological self-awareness. On the importance of the kingdom in Jesus's teaching see Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 12-13, Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 43-47, Kindle; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 68-70, Logos Bible Software; George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1959); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 42-132; Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 23-24, Logos Bible Software. Even critical scholars, skeptical about the extent to which the Gospels accurately convey Jesus's actual teachings, acknowledge at least some correspondence between Jesus's teaching in history and the Gospel record. Dale C. Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 12-13, 19-20; Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 207, Kindle.

²⁹ Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 24. See also Ben Witherington III, *Reading and Understanding the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 78-92.

³⁰ Even John seems to express uncertainty about Jesus's messianic identity when Jesus fails to meet John's apparent messianic expectations of immanent judgment (Matt 11:2-4; cf. 3:10-12). See D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of EBC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), sec. 4.A.1.a, "2-3," para. 2, Kindle.

and themes—features prominently in Matthew.³¹ As counselors interact with Matthew’s Gospel, they encounter a historical narrative teeming with theological perspective.³²

The Gospels’ theologically-recounted history not only provides counselors with theological propositions valuable for counseling but also implications—philosophical, ethical, religious, etc.—significant for counseling concerns. John Frame’s conception of ethics-as-theology suggests this close correspondence between theological concerns and ethical implications and should not surprise readers of the Gospels.³³ Similarly, J. de Waal Dryden sees the evangelists’ theological impulses extending beyond mere propositions. The Gospel writers communicate propositional truth, but they do more: “While the Gospels as historical testimony communicate both historical and theological truths about the person and work of Jesus, their chief aim is to orient their readers’ lives around those truths, not simply to teach Christology.”³⁴ The Gospels are theologically significant for teaching theology and orienting readers’ lives around that theology.

Connections to other literary forms. In these three threads, Matthew and the other Gospels reflect their production against the backdrop of OT history’s literary and theological contributions.³⁵ A strong case also exists for resemblances between the

³¹ Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 346.

³² Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 97; cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 508; Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels as Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 66.

³³ Recall Frame’s definition of theology: “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life” (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1987], 81). In relation to this definition, “ethics is theology, viewed as a means of determining which persons, acts, and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not” (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008], 10).

³⁴ J. de Wall Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 121. Rather than “their chief aim,” rephrasing Dryden’s assertion to read “a chief aim” seems more accurate.

³⁵ Alexander, “What Is A Gospel,” 27-28; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 372; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 6-16; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN:

Gospels and Greco-Roman βίῳι (i.e., biographical texts).³⁶ However, the influence of Greco-Roman βίῳι is inadequate as a sole literary predecessor to the Gospels.³⁷ Other antecedent literature has also been proposed as literary forerunners.³⁸ In the end, the Gospels possess “family resemblances” to divergent types of antecedent literature—especially βίῳι and OT literature—such that the Gospels are a unique blend (i.e., something “new”) of prior forms of literature (i.e., something “old”).³⁹ Matthew and the other evangelists draw from their OT predecessors as communicators who interweave history and theology in their literature, and the Gospels are like Greco-Roman βίῳι in their preservation and presentation of the exemplary words and deeds of Jesus, which

Fortress Press, 2007), 29, 42-43. Collins is specifically concerned with Mark’s relation to the OT.

³⁶ Burrige, *What Are the Gospels*, 105-307.

³⁷ Others also consider the influence of Greco-Roman βίῳι, particularly noting the contribution of Burrige’s work, but contend that his proposal—specifically that the Gospels are a subgenre of Greco-Roman βίῳι—fails to convince. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 22-31; cf. Alexander, “What Is a Gospel,” 26; Collins, *Mark*, 22-29.

³⁸ Alexander, “What Is a Gospel,” 17-27; Collins, *Mark*, 29-44; Constantine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 96, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁹ Burrige and Vanhoozer credit Alastair Fowler for the concept of “family resemblances.” Burrige, *What Are the Gospels*, 108-22; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 340; referencing Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Alastair Fowler, “The Life and Death of Literary Forms,” in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1974). See also Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 98; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 19.

Matthew’s record of two “new” and “old” statements by Jesus are suggestive for viewing the Gospels as unique blends of prior textual forms (9:16-17; 13:51-52). Patrick Schreiner contends the scribe-master parallel (13:51-52) offers “an entry point into Matthew’s aims and theology” as well as the methodology of Matthew, who “as the scribe passes on the wisdom of Jesus—listening to his use of the new and the old” (Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019], 2). For Schreiner, this illustration captures Matthew’s approach to using the OT to teach his readers about Jesus. Together, the images in Matthew 9 and 13 convey theological convictions about Jesus’s relationship to antecedent Scripture and the use Jesus’s followers would make of what came before in their teaching about Jesus. Extrapolating beyond the evangelists’ preaching about Jesus, such convictions about continuity and discontinuity would understandably inform the evangelists’ choice of literary record about Jesus. The result would be a unique blend of prior forms of literature (i.e., something “old”) that bears continuity with prior forms—especially OT narrative, but also perhaps other forms such as Greco-Roman βίῳι. This understanding explains the similarities scholars like Burrige and other have cataloged between the Gospels and other literary forms. However, rather than genetic identity, the literary product would also reflect observable discontinuity (i.e., something “new”) because of the inadequacy of old literary wineskins—canonical or secular—to contain adequately the witness to Jesus’s new wine. Here, history, literature, and theology phenomenologically intertwine: theological convictions impact the evangelists’ use of literary forms historically available to them, resulting in literature possessing family resemblances—similarities without identity (i.e., continuity and discontinuity)—with prior forms.

convey practices to follow and virtues to embrace.⁴⁰ Such influences remind counselors of the rich and diverse value of the Gospels for counselors and counselees alike.

The unity Matthew possesses with the other Gospels—the centrality of Jesus; the overall narrative structure; the interweaving of history, literature, and theology; the blend of old and new literary forms—suggests significant overlap in how all the Gospels contribute to the theory and practice of biblical counseling. The diversity—content included and excluded, the arrangement of content, differences in the details of shared content, variations in thematic emphases—suggests each Gospel has unique contributions to offer biblical counseling. In order to grasp Matthew’s contributions, counselors should possess a familiarity with how that Gospel communicates.

How the Gospel of Matthew Communicates

To approach Matthew’s Gospel wisely, counselors need to anticipate the book’s unified diversity of interwoven history, literature, and theology and also appreciate the evangelists’ primary tools of communication.⁴¹ Though Matthew blends them together, Matthew’s communicative methods subdivide into three main elements: individual episodes, Jesus’s teaching, and a carefully tailored story.⁴² Familiarity with these elements positions counselors to approach Matthew’s Gospel with care and wisdom. As part of this delineation, brief observations about Matthew’s attention to the human heart—a matter of no small concern to biblical counselors (see chapter 2)—illustrate how Matthew artfully handles a single theme (or group of themes) in multiple

⁴⁰ Burridge, *What Are the Gospels*, 248-50; Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 101-02; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 33-34; Schreiner, *Matthew*, 51-54.

⁴¹ For texts as acts of communication, see Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 29-55; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 201-366.

⁴² Narratives and teaching portions exist on a spectrum but “defining the ends of the spectrum provides a helpful paradigm” (Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 106n28).

ways.⁴³ These examples demonstrate that awareness of Matthew’s rhetorical strategies positions counselors to grasp the Gospel’s divinely and diversely given guidance.

Through episodes. Matthew’s overarching story contains multiple individual episodes that give glimpses—some narrowed and detailed (e.g., 15:21-28) and others broad and surveylike (e.g., 15:29-31)—into the life of Jesus. These episodes often possess combinations of story-telling elements which Matthew leverages to communicate with his readers.⁴⁴ Jesus is almost always the main character in these stories, and Matthew uses these episodes to convey his theology through Christology in action.⁴⁵ Through Jesus’s miraculous acts and authoritative declarations, Matthew repeatedly presents Jesus as one to be known, believed, and worshipped (14:33; 28:17; cf. 2:2). Such responses begin in the respondent’s heart (6:21, 24; 22:37; cf. 15:7-9). However, Matthew’s Jesus is not to be known from a distance. He is the One after whom disciples are to model their lives (4:18-22; 16:21-25). For example, Matthew repeatedly refers to Jesus’s experience of compassion in both narrated comments (9:36; 14:14; 20:34) and Jesus’s own words (15:32), thereby offering the Lord as an example to emulate.⁴⁶

Though unmatched in priority, Jesus is not the sole character by which Matthew communicates. Jesus is rarely alone in the Gospel (exceptions include 4:1-2; 14:23; 26:39, 42, 44). Secondary characters of various types—some appearing only once (e.g., supplicants seeking healing), and others multiple times throughout (e.g., disciples,

⁴³ For a summary of “heart” (*καρδία*) in Matthew, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 92-94.

⁴⁴ Pennington’s model for reading gives special focus to the role of characters, plot, and settings in each episode. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 172-80.

⁴⁵ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 11.

⁴⁶ Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 78. Through the call to imitation, the Gospels share an affinity with some examples of βίαι. Alexander, “What Is a Gospel,” 27; Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 29; Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 101-02; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 33-34.

Pharisees, etc.)—play pivotal roles in the Gospel’s communication, primarily as they interact with Jesus. These character’s responses to Jesus teach as both examples (8:8-13; 15:21-28) and warnings (12:1-8; 16:1-4).⁴⁷ Matthew consistently narrates brief accounts and his meta-story from an “evaluative point of view.”⁴⁸ That is, Matthew evaluates the participants (and events) of his stories by “rendering some judgment on them in terms of the degree to which they are ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’”⁴⁹ Consistently, “Jesus is the one major character whom Matthew always puts in the right.”⁵⁰

At times, Matthew evaluates characters by casting a light on their inward qualities. Matthew sometimes uses a “telling” mode of narration by which he directly describes a character’s internal experience or response to a situation (1:19; 2:3, 16; 13:57; 20:24).⁵¹ Similarly, the words of the always reliable Jesus—and his capacity to discern the hearts of others—also expose the heart condition of characters in the Gospel and guide readers in their interpretation of these characters (8:10, 26; 9:4; cf. 12:25).⁵² Jesus’s assessments again provide an example as he models how the reader should assess these same characters.⁵³ On other occasions, the Gospel writer employs a “showing” mode of narration to convey suggestively a character’s heart condition through their own words and actions (9:11, 34; 27:4b, 6-7). In the Gospel, both Matthew (as narrator) and Jesus (as God’s “supreme agent”) provide reliable perspectives that are “in complete alignment

⁴⁷ Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 68. Different characters in the same story often contrast with each other through opposing responses (9:1-8; 12:22-24; 21:14-17; 26:6-13).

⁴⁸ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 32; cf. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 161-62.

⁴⁹ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 33; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 64-65.

⁵⁰ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 10.

⁵¹ Wiarda discusses both “telling” and “showing” modes of narration. Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 37.

⁵² Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 12-13.

⁵³ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 10-11.

with the evaluative point of view of God” (Matt 16:23).⁵⁴ Through Matthew’s and Jesus’s positive and negative evaluations of other characters, the writer encourages his readers either to identify with or distance themselves, respectively, from such characters.⁵⁵

Some episodes give brief but consequential glimpses of a “human moment,” an event that “may highlight an aspect of the character’s condition, an attitude, a personal trait, a feeling, or any combination of these. These highlighted qualities lead to or come to expression in a particular moment of experience.”⁵⁶ For example, the scribes’ accusations of blasphemy in response to Jesus’s extension of forgiveness exposes the Jewish leaders’ hard-heartedness and hostility to Jesus (9:3; cf. 3:7-10; 26:65). In contrast, supplicants seeking healing manifest laudable trust and confidence in Christ (8:1-4; 9:20-22; 15:21-28).⁵⁷ Occasionally, Matthew presents a character’s experience in “a brief story of inward change.”⁵⁸ Matthew’s first pericope describes such change. Initially skeptical and hesitant about his betrothed’s pregnancy, Joseph’s becomes assured and moves forward in obedience to embrace God’s miraculous work (1:18-25; cf. 8:23-27; 14:26, 33). Through direct descriptions and conveyance of their responses (especially towards Jesus), Matthew frequently uses these secondary participants—both those sympathetic and antagonistic to Jesus—to advance his theology, present attitudes and values for his readers to embrace or reject, and motivate change in his readers.⁵⁹

Frequently these other characters find themselves in dilemmas beyond their capacity to address or comprehend (14:13-21; 17:14-21; 20:29-34). Such situations can

⁵⁴ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 33; cf. Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 73-74.

⁵⁵ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123.

⁵⁶ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 10.

⁵⁷ Wiarda discusses the Lukan parallel to Matthew 8:2-4 (Luke 5:12-16) as an example of one such story. Wiarda, *Interpreting the Gospels*, 10-15.

⁵⁸ See Wiarda, *Interpreting the Gospels*, 15.

⁵⁹ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 11-13, 33.

expose the heart condition of the story's participants (8:24-26; 14:30-31). Timothy Wiarda observes that "the way a story is told—the flow of events, narrative details, nuances of characterization, and so on" can all point to "an episode's theological or pastoral emphasis."⁶⁰ Graham Twelftree surveys Matthew's miracle stories and demonstrates how these accounts offer more than a reliable historical record.⁶¹ Twelftree observes how Matthew focuses his reader's attention on Jesus to advance his Christology by minimizing narrative details, while also confirming the priority of faith and exposing the distance between Jesus and those who doubt him.⁶² The miracle stories, especially those in Matthew 8 and 9, also function "as prisms to develop a number themes relating to discipleship."⁶³ The miracles in Matthew confirm Jesus's authority over the demonic, teach Jesus's capacity to care for his people, highlight the significance of salvation provided by Jesus, and prepare for Jesus's cross-culminating suffering.⁶⁴ As Matthew narrates the experiences and responses of Jesus and others, the evangelist richly interweaves the historical and theological in carefully told literary accounts.

Not only what Matthew and the other evangelists write but what they withhold—"narrative gaps"—contributes to their storytelling.⁶⁵ Compared with parallel accounts in Mark, Matthew's pericopes are frequently shorter.⁶⁶ R. T. France attributes

⁶⁰ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 53.

⁶¹ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 102-43.

⁶² Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 140-42.

⁶³ Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 142; cf. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 3.A, "Overview," para. 5; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:3-5.

⁶⁴ Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 142-43.

⁶⁵ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 38. See also Brown's discussion of relevance theory and inferences communicative recipients make (Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 35-38).

⁶⁶ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 133; cf. Carson, *Matthew*, "Introduction," sec. 3, para. 9; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 73, Logos Bible Software.

this brevity—particularly in the “scenery” of the stories—to Matthew’s concern to get his message across.⁶⁷ Wiarda observes that the evangelists sometimes withhold details simply because “the momentum of the narrative is sufficient to carry readers across the empty spaces.”⁶⁸ At other times, however, the authors seem to use such gaps “to create a measure of ambiguity and thus challenge readers to reflect on a character’s actions or motives more deeply.”⁶⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale Allison observe multiple Gospel parallels in which Mark describes Jesus as experiencing emotion, inability, or ignorance, while Matthew offers no such description (e.g., Matt 12:13; Mark 3:5).⁷⁰ This variation does not imply a disinterest on Matthew’s part about Jesus’s internal experiences (8:10; 11:29; 26:37). Instead, brevity and narrative gaps in Matthew can challenge readers to pause and consider the motivations in the responses and actions of Jesus and others in the story (13:46-50; 14:28-29; 15:21-28).⁷¹ Discerning communicative intent in relation to missing information calls for care to avoid fallacious arguments from silence since no writer can write everything that could be written (cf. John 20:30-31).⁷²

Matthew’s storytelling, especially as he recounts Jesus’s interactions with others, becomes a key conduit through which Matthew implicitly passes along his theology and system of values.⁷³ As Dryden observes, “Like other narratives, the Gospels

⁶⁷ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 134-35.

⁶⁸ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 38.

⁶⁹ Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 38. Wiarda cites Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 186-263 as a helpful resource for additional details about the use of narrative gaps.

⁷⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:104-05.

⁷¹ For example, Matthew acknowledges that Jesus gave no response to the Canaanite mother’s initial request (15:23), while Mark gives no indication of Jesus’s initial silence (Mark 7:26-27). Though he presents Jesus as initially silent, Matthew offers no explanation for this surprising response; readers must fill this gap themselves. On the opposite end, Jesus’s final response to the Canaanite woman in Matthew reads as much more effusive than in Mark (Matt 15:28; Mark 7:29).

⁷² Joel B. Green, *How to Read the Gospels and Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 105; cf. Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 43-44.

⁷³ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123.

teach practical wisdom by instilling in readers a personal allegiance to a particular value-laden picture of the world. Through narrative engagement, readers have their cultural and instinctive systems of values questioned, realigned, and reinforced.”⁷⁴ Through Matthew’s short stories about Jesus, the evangelist acts as a reliable, discipling teacher whose understanding and conviction exert a normative influence on his readers.⁷⁵

Through Jesus’s teaching. The Gospels generally—and the Gospel of Matthew in particular—are not shy about Jesus’s activity as a teacher.⁷⁶ Matthew’s first mention of Jesus’s public ministry refers to his proclamation (4:17), and periodic summations of Jesus’s ministry activity frequently call attention to his teaching (4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23). Our evangelist uniquely presents large portions of Jesus’s teaching in five separate discourses throughout the Gospel (e.g., 5:3-7:27; 24:4-25:46).⁷⁷ Matthew also weaves other extended recountings of Jesus’s teaching into his narrative (12:25-37; 21:27-44; 22:1-14).⁷⁸ Pronouncement stories—“a brief story in which an event

⁷⁴ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123.

⁷⁵ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 125.

⁷⁶ In Matthew, Jesus is referred to as a teacher (*διδάσκαλος*)—either as an honorific title “Teacher” (8:19) or as a reference to his role and activity (9:11)—ten times (8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 23:8; 26:18). Jesus also uses *διδάσκαλος* twice proverbially to describe the relationship of disciples with their teacher, and the application is to himself (as the teacher) and his disciples (10:24, 25). Judas twice calls Jesus “Rabbi” (*ῥαββί*; 26:25, 49). However, the title on the lips of the betrayer only tangentially admits Jesus’s role as a teacher. Instead, it is a conspicuous contrast with the title “Lord” (*κύριε*) used by the other disciples (26:22). Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 768, Logos Bible Software. For Burridge, one reason for associating the Gospels with the subgenre of religious or philosophical *βίοι* is the Gospels’ “use of discourse and teaching material” (Burridge, *What are the Gospels*, 240).

⁷⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:59-61; France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 142-43, 154-56. Scholars debate whether Matthew’s fifth and final discourse also includes Jesus’s seven woes (Matt 23:2-39). For example, Carson and Davies and Allison distinguish Jesus’s woes from the Olivet discourse. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 6.B, “Overview”; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:64. Keener and Blomberg include Jesus’s woes. Keener, *Matthew*, 37; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 338-39.

⁷⁸ In contrast, Mark identifies Jesus as a teacher but recounts only four parables (Mark 4:1-20, 26-29, 30-32; 12:1-12), while other teaching material “emerges in dialogue with the religious leaders in response to their questions” (Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 42; cf. Mark 2:15-28; 3:23-30; 7:1-23). In Luke’s Gospel, the teaching of Jesus figures prominently in the narrative of Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27). So Strauss observes, “Though notices in the text occasionally remind the reader that Jesus is traveling (9:57; 10:1, 38; 18:35; 19:1), or that he is heading for Jerusalem (9:51-56; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28, 41; cf. 19:45), the bulk of the material is not a travel itinerary at all but the teaching of

in Jesus's life is linked with a memorable saying or proverb by Jesus"—also highlight Jesus's teaching in their climactic declarations of Jesus (8:18-22; 9:10-13; 22:34-40).⁷⁹ While episodes and characters play important roles in Matthew, the teaching of Jesus is particularly prominent in this Gospel. The priority Matthew gives to Jesus's teaching leads Pennington to acknowledge a limited application of his narrative model for this Gospel, "which seems less concerned with providing well-told stories about Jesus than with using narratives to relay certain teachings about Jesus."⁸⁰

In his record of Jesus's teaching, Matthew presents Jesus's broad range of rhetorical devices which must be recognized to grasp the rich content Jesus's teaching.⁸¹ Parables stand out among Jesus's strategies because of their frequency and memorability.⁸² Klyne Snodgrass estimates that "parables make up about thirty-five percent of Jesus's teaching in the Synoptics."⁸³ In Matthew and the other Gospels,

Jesus together with a few miracle stories" (Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 273). In the fourth Gospel, Strauss discerns three distinct ways John presents Jesus's teaching: "interviews with individuals (3:1-21; 4:1-38), dialogue and debates with the Jewish leaders (5:19-47; 6:25-59; 7:14-44; 8:12-59; 9:40-10:21; 10:22-42; 12:23-36), and private teaching of his disciples (14:1-16:33)" (Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 302).

⁷⁹ Ryken identifies six subtypes of pronouncement stories: "correction, objection, commendation, quest, test, and inquiry" (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 381); cf. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 530-31.

⁸⁰ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 178.

⁸¹ Only a brief survey of these devices is provided here. See sources cited and references therein for additional details.

⁸² Due in no small part to their prominence, parables have received book length treatments, including Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), Logos Bible Software; Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus's Parables*, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), Logos Bible Software; Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2008); Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). Shorter treatments within larger works include Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 286-88; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 154-67; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 524-28; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 208-18; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 423-48; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 26-29; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 291-311; Klyne Snodgrass, "Parable," in Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 591-601; Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 158-73, Kindle; Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 33-59.

⁸³ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 22; cf. Stein, *Method and Message*, 33. Parables encompass a wide range of literary forms, and Snodgrass distinguishes between seven different types of parables based on form and function. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 11.

parables are vehicles for theological truth about God, Jesus, and the kingdom, but they also provoke hearers (or readers) to examination and response.⁸⁴ Through his parables, Jesus frequently draws attention to internal responses of his hearers, especially to God's kingdom reign in Christ (13:3-9, 18-23, 44-46; 18:23-35; 21:28-32). Like all other historical events Matthew recounts, the evangelist recounts parables within the overall communicative network of his Gospel.⁸⁵

Closely related to parables, illustrations feature in Jesus's teaching (9:15-17; 12:25; 19:24), including the verbal picture of trees, roots, and fruit that captures the internal-external dynamic of human response and is commonly picked up by biblical counselors (7:15-20; 12:33-37).⁸⁶ Jesus also directly asserts propositional truth (5:17-18, 15:13; 19:6), quotes OT Scriptures (15:4; 22:43), and alludes to the same (12:40; 16:4). Jesus communicates with forms such as beatitude (5:3-11), warning (5:22; 18:35), promise (19:28-30), command (5:23-24) and question (16:13, 15; 22:42-45). He instructs through prayer by supplying a model example of prayer (6:9-15; cf. John 17:1-26). Jesus's concern for heart-level issues frequently comes through these devices (6:12, 14-15; 9:13; 15:7-9). Robert Stein locates at least eighteen rhetorical strategies in Jesus's teaching, including five forms of parallelism.⁸⁷ Jesus's Gospels-recorded instruction also evidences other higher-ordered strategies, including repetition (5:3-11, 21, 27, etc.; 23:13, 15, 16, etc.), inclusio (19:11-12; 19:30; 20:16), and chiasms.⁸⁸ Jesus also employs

⁸⁴ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 2, 21.

⁸⁵ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 26.

⁸⁶ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 81-85.

⁸⁷ Stein, *Method and Message*, 7-32.

⁸⁸ Commentators differ in their identification of chiasms in Matthew. For example, Carson explicitly marks chiasms at 16:24-28; 23:2-4, 13-32. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 12, "28," para. 14; sec. 6.A.8.e.1, "4," para. 3; sec. 6.A.8.e.2, "Overview," para. 2. Nolland tags 6:14-15; 18:10-14; and 20:25-27. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 293-94, 740, 823, Logos Bible Software. Davies and Allison label 7:7-11; 10:5-42; and 23:16-22. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:678; 2:162; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, ICC (London; New York: T

comparison and contrast (6:2-4, 5-6, 16-18, 19-20; 10:28; 25:31-46). A number of strategies in Stein's list are forms of comparison (e.g., simile, metaphor, *a fortiori*, etc.), and parables often operate with two layers of comparison. Functionally, parables frequently communicate analogically by comparing two different aspects of reality (e.g., "The kingdom of heaven is like . . .," 13:31, 33, etc.).⁸⁹ However, parables often contain a second, internal layer of juxtapositions crucial to the parables' messages (13:3-8, 18-23, 24-30, 36-43; 18:23-34; 25:1-12, 14-30).⁹⁰

With these diverse didactic tools, Matthew relays truth and provides faithful guidance from Jesus's itinerant ministry. Jesus's teaching relays "a vision of life that highlights certain values, dispositions, and behaviors while at the same time challenging devotions to competing systems of understanding and values."⁹¹ Jesus's instruction thus "serves to reorient devotions."⁹² Matthew stresses that Jesus was more than a teacher, but he also shows that Jesus was not less. The Messiah's teaching stands alongside and enmeshed in Matthew's episodes as a crucial element in his communication.

Through the tailored Gospel. Matthew uses brief episodes and various lengths of Jesus's teaching within the structure of a carefully tailored Gospel. Matthew's story shares its basic trajectory with the other Gospels (i.e., unity with diversity): a loose chronological ordering of selected actions, experiences, and sayings of Jesus that devotes at least 15 percent of the story (by verse count) to the period from the night of Jesus's betrayal through post-resurrection events.⁹³ This core narrative achieves at least two

& T Clark International, 2004), 289, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 9; Stein, *Basic Guide*. 158.

⁹⁰ Blomberg, *Interpreting Parables*, 170ff.

⁹¹ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 105.

⁹² Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 106.

⁹³ Larry W. Hurtado, "Gospel (Genre)," in Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 278. According to Burridge's analysis, this period occupies 15.1 percent of Matthew, 19.1 percent of Mark, 15.6 of Luke, and 15.7 percent of John. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels*, 191-92, 218; cf.

communicative effects that resonate with smaller Gospel elements. First, the primary plot establishes the disposition and practice of self-sacrifice as a way of life for Jesus's followers (16:21-26; 20:25-28).⁹⁴ Secondly the overall narrative conveys that self-sacrifice is not an end in itself, as Christ's self-sacrifice is ultimately superseded by the glory of the resurrection. This story structure "grounds the narrative of self-sacrifice in hope" and "provides motivating force and ideational context to acts of gospel service."⁹⁵

While the Gospels share this basic trajectory, each Gospel possesses, in the details, its own unique plotline.⁹⁶ Matthew's narrative contains multiple strategies to interweave and reinforce historical and theological emphases for his readers. Repetition regularly unites pericopes and Jesus's teaching.⁹⁷ First, repeated characters are among the most recognizable repetition. Jesus receives the most attention.⁹⁸ Next in prominence are the disciples and the Jewish leadership.⁹⁹ Matthew's Jewish leaders are "flat" characters appearing as "a monolithic front opposed to Jesus . . . [and] give no evidence of undergoing change in the course of the story."¹⁰⁰ Jesus's repeated excoriation of them as

Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 30n37.

⁹⁴ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 127.

⁹⁵ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 127.

⁹⁶ Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 30.

⁹⁷ Some of the Gospels' features discussed here are treated elsewhere distinct from repetition. A comprehensive treatment of these features exceeds the current project's scope, thus they are combined here under the umbrella "repetition" since they all exhibit repetitiveness.

⁹⁸ Burrige confirms Jesus as the repeated center of attention by analyzing verb subjects in the Gospels. For the synoptics, he observes, "Approximately half of the verbs . . . are taken up with Jesus's words and deeds" (Burrige, *What Are the Gospels*, 191). In Matthew, 17.2% of the verbs have Jesus as their subject, and an additional 42.5% of the verbs are contained in Jesus's teaching and parables. Burrige, 190. John's Gospel exhibits similar patterns. Burrige, 216.

⁹⁹ Burrige tallies that the disciples (individually and corporately) are subjects of 8.8% of Matthew's verbs, and Jewish leaders function as the subjects of 4.4% of verbs. Burrige, *What are the Gospels*, 190. The other Gospels have similar distributions. Burrige, 190, 217. "The crowds," another repeated group, are not examined separately here. They function as foils to both the disciples and the Jewish leaders: "The Jewish crowds are 'well disposed' toward Jesus but 'without faith' in him. In being without faith in Jesus, they contrast to the disciples. And in being well disposed toward Jesus, they contrast to their leaders" (Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 24).

¹⁰⁰ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 17. Because of this flatness and despite reference to different groups (i.e., Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, etc.), Kingsbury suggests considering them as one character for

“hypocrites” (ὑποκριτής) emphasizes the inconsistency between their righteous appearances and their wicked hearts (15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; cf. 23:28).¹⁰¹ This group and their demonstrated beliefs and values embody a vision of God and life before him Matthew’s readers should reject, thereby indirectly reinforcing the vision and values Matthew wants his readers to cultivate.¹⁰²

While the Jewish leaders are flat, the disciples are “round” in that “they possess not only numerous traits but also traits that conflict.”¹⁰³ The historical disciples play important literary and theological roles in Matthew, culminating in Jesus’s concluding call for them to “make disciples” (28:19-20).¹⁰⁴ Among the disciples, Peter also receives particular attention at points in the Gospel (e.g., 14:28-31; 16:16-19, 22-23) and “functions as a representative of the character group of the disciples.”¹⁰⁵ At times the disciples align with the convictions and values Jesus and Matthew advocate (4:18-22; 16:16), but other occasions present them less favorably (19:10; 26:9).¹⁰⁶ Other characters’

the purposes of observing Matthew’s use of them in his story. The Jewish leaders demonstrate what Wiarda calls a “consistent character,” or “a pattern of characterization in which an individual figure is shown to display one or more distinctive traits, attitudes, or values in multiple episodes in a single Gospel” (Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 21). Also noting the role this group has for Matthew’s plotline, Kingsbury asserts that only Jesus surpasses the Jewish leaders in moving Matthew’s overall narrative forward. Kingsbury, 17.

¹⁰¹ Jesus also uses the term (6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 24:51) without reference to any subset of Jewish society but with the same emphasis on discrepancies between internal reality and external appearances: “a doubleness of actions and the inner person or heart” (Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 92).

¹⁰² Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 17-18; cf. Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123.

¹⁰³ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew’s Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 221-22. The prominence of the disciples is reflected in the frequency of Matthew’s references. The noun μαθητής occurs seventy-two times in Matthew. All instances except three refer to Jesus’s followers or are used by Jesus in proverbial statements (10:24, 25). Among the Gospels, only John has more occurrences at seventy-eight. Additionally, the verbs μαθηάω and μαθητεύω occur three times each in Matthew. For discussion of Matthew’s use of these terms, see Wilkins, *Discipleship*, 126-172; Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 39-43.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Disciples*, 42. See also, Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:647-52; Wilkins, *Discipleship*, 173-216.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 161; Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew’s Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text-Connoted Reader Is Informed* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 1. Brown sees the difference lying in the distinction between “comprehending the

positive and negative responses to Jesus (e.g., supplicants in their reliance on Jesus, and Herod, respectively) serve as foils to the variegated disciples and reinforce Matthew's vision for following Jesus.¹⁰⁷ The disciples' undulations picture the imperfect experience of any follower of Jesus, "fully aware of what Jesus wants but . . . not able to meet this ideal."¹⁰⁸ Consistent with Matthew's attention to heart-level concerns, Matthew describes the disciples' internal responses to events and situations on multiple occasions (e.g., 8:27; 14:26; 17:23).¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, Jesus's consistency establishes the model to imitate, but "the disciples are the main identification point for readers and so their main entry point into the narrative."¹¹⁰ Matthew's mixed portrait of the disciples challenges readers to examine themselves and consider what it means "for a disciple to be like his teacher" (10:25).¹¹¹

Beyond characters, Matthew's repetitions also include key words and phrases. For example, titles repeatedly applied to Jesus cement the evangelist's witness to Jesus's identity and mission.¹¹² Additionally, Davies and Allison publish two hundred thirty-eight words that "highlight certain key Matthean themes."¹¹³ Repeated words and themes

identity of Jesus as Messiah (e.g., 16:13-20)" and misunderstanding "consistently the kind of Messiah Jesus is (i.e., his mission to suffer and die) as well as Jesus' teaching about their own part in the kingdom he brings" (Brown, *Disciples*, 148).

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Disciples*, 149-50.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Gospels as Stories*, 97-99.

¹¹⁰ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 124n79.

¹¹¹ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 16; cf. Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 124-25.

¹¹² The preeminent titles for Jesus in Matthew are "Lord" (31x, including one instance where Matthew applies an OT quotation to Jesus), "Son of Man" (30x), "Christ" (14x), "Son of God" (9x) and "Son of David" (9x). Additionally, Jesus is also called "Teacher" seven times, "son of Abraham" once, and "Immanuel" once (by application of an OT quotation). The titles are important but not the sole means by which Matthew conveys his Christology. France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 280.

¹¹³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:79. They begin with a list first prepared by J. C. Hawkins of ninety-five Matthean words. Davies and Allison, 1:74-76; referencing J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae: Contributions to the Study of the Synoptic Problem*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909). To Hawkins's list, Davies and Allison add one hundred forty-three words and phrases important for Matthew's Gospel writing. Davies and Allison, 1:76-79. They group verbal emphases and identify the following repeated Matthean themes: eschatology, judgment, ethics, ecclesiology, OT revelation, and "Davidic Christology and the issue of kingship" (Davies and Allison, 1:79-80).

bind episodes and Jesus's teaching, including "heart" (*καρδία*).¹¹⁴ By his repeated fulfillment formula, Matthew stresses Jesus's fulfillment of the OT.¹¹⁵ John Nolland also points to repeated references to future weeping and gnashing of teeth (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and the Pharisees as "offspring of vipers" (3:7; 12:34; 23:33) as establishing other emphases in Matthew.¹¹⁶ Through such repetition, Matthew draws his reader's attention to important themes.

Overlapping but not coextensive with recurring vocabulary, "Often some element or idea in a story is reused; its thread is pulled, sometimes ever so slightly, so that the sensitive reader can see connections between stories and thereby sense a deeper issue and levels of meaning."¹¹⁷ Borrowing from Allison, Pennington refers to this pattern as "intratextuality."¹¹⁸ Intratextuality appears through "themes and ideas worked out in more than one story throughout the narrative, often providing consummation of an earlier idea in a later pericope."¹¹⁹

Matthew's internal repetition segues into two other related and substantial

¹¹⁴ Pennington identifies nine key terms and themes important both for the Sermon on the Mount and the whole of Matthew's Gospel. Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 41-103. See also Pennington's examination of Matthew's persistent and strategic use of *οὐρανός* (Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* [2007; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009]).

¹¹⁵ Specifically, Matthew introduces ten OT quotes with variations of "all this happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled" (1:21; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Nolland, *Matthew*, 23-24. Though not explicit variations on the fulfillment formula, similar language elsewhere also points to Scripture's fulfillment (2:5; 3:3; 13:14; 26:56). Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013), 110, Kindle.

¹¹⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 24.

¹¹⁷ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 189. In Matthew, Jesus's three-fold prediction of his suffering and death qualify as explicit foreshadowing in the Gospel narrative, while the reference to the newborn baby as "king of the Jews" (in contrast to Herod) serves as more subtle foreshadowing of the same term used three times in the Passion narrative. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 190.

¹¹⁸ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 190; referencing Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹¹⁹ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 190-91. Pennington specifically cites John Riches's observations of intratextual connections between Matthew's conclusion (Matt 28:18-20) and earlier portions of Matthew's Gospels. Pennington, 190-91; referencing John Riches, "Matthew's Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective," in *The Gospels of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John Riches and David Sim (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 128, 137.

ways the evangelist communicates. First, Matthew repeatedly associates his account of Jesus's life and ministry with the OT.¹²⁰ Matthew returns ten times to his prophetic fulfillment formula to link events of his narrative to the OT.¹²¹ However, the fulfillment formulas only scratch the surface of Matthew's OT associations.¹²² Patrick Schreiner brings together Matthew's rich strategy of OT associations under the umbrella term "shadow stories."¹²³ For Schreiner,

[Shadow stories] connect large swaths of narrative rather than just points or dots in the story. The point here is to push people past simply looking for similar terms and to look for a combination of these factors and the development of a narrative through quotes, allusions, and echoes. The main importance of this is that as we study Matthew, we should be looking for more than "word" connections; we should watch for "narrative" echoes as well.¹²⁴

Matthew explicitly and subtly connects his narrative to OT persons, "events, institutions, things, offices, and actions."¹²⁵ As Richard Hays concludes, "Matthew imaginatively draws upon [OT] Scripture to retell the story of Israel, to narrate the story of Jesus, and to map the role of the church in relation to the pagan world."¹²⁶ From Schreiner's perspective, Matthew leverages the OT in this way precisely because Jesus taught his

¹²⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1.

¹²¹ See Schreiner for a helpful survey of scholarly discussion on Matthew's use of these formulas—both his hermeneutical method and his use of these fulfillment quotations in his Gospel. Schreiner, *Matthew*, 38-44.

¹²² Scholars count approximately sixty OT quotations in the first Gospel. Blomberg, "Matthew," 1; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 109, Kindle; Donald Senior, "The Lure of the Formula Quotations: Re-assessing Matthew's Use of the Old Testament with the Passion Narrative as a Test-Case," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1997), 89. In addition to explicit quotes, Donald Senior points out, "The Nestle-Aland appendix lists 294 implicit citations or allusions in Matthew" (Senior, 89). Observing how all the Gospel writers refer to the OT, Richard Hays uses "quotation," "allusion," and "echo" to distinguish types of connections but recognizes the boundaries are not airtight. Hays, 10-11.

¹²³ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 55. Schreiner credits Senior for the phrase. See Senior, "Lure of the Formula Quotations," 115.

¹²⁴ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 55.

¹²⁵ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 55; cf. 55-57.

¹²⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 186.

disciples to understand him and his ministry through this grid.¹²⁷ As a discipled scribe, Matthew paints his portrait of Jesus with OT hues so that his readers “might see the values of Wisdom embodied.”¹²⁸ Through this tinted portrait, Matthew points the way, as his reader’s discipler, to theological wisdom, which includes practical and ethical wisdom.¹²⁹

Matthew also strategically uses repetition to organize his Gospel presentation. Commentators frequently point to two verbal patterns to unearth Matthew’s primary structure: 1) the consistent statements that conclude the five discourses (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1),¹³⁰ and 2) the twice repeated “from that time Jesus began” (4:17; 16:21).¹³¹ Some see Matthew’s organization as a combination of these two options.¹³² Others contend for other structures.¹³³ Scholarly consensus remains elusive, as each

¹²⁷ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 61-62.

¹²⁸ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 54.

¹²⁹ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 247-53. Though Schreiner differentiates theological from practical and ethical wisdom, his descriptions recognize a significant theological element in practical and ethical wisdom. Thus, this tripartite division can be reasonably subsumed under a broader conception of theological wisdom that coheres with Frame’s broad understanding of theology as described above. See Tremper Longman III’s *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom* for broader conceptions of practical, ethical, and theological wisdom with which Schreiner’s descriptions harmonize. Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 5-25.

¹³⁰ Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 135-42; Carson, *Matthew*, “Introduction,” sec. 14, “Structure,” para. 5; Schreiner, *Matthew*, 211; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), “Introduction,” “How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew,” “Study the Plot at the Macro Level,” para. 3, Kindle; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 9-10; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 31, Kindle.

¹³¹ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 19ff.; David Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Bible and Literature Series 15 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988), 73-108; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1975), 7-25; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 9, Logos Bible Software.

¹³² Blomberg, *Matthew*, 22-25; Keener, *Matthew*, 37; Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 14-15, Logos Bible Software.

¹³³ Others perceive a chiasmic structure centering on either Matthew 11 or 13. Bauer, *Structure of Matthew’s Gospel*, 36-40; Green, *Matthew*, 30-37; referencing Elizabeth and Ian Billingham, *The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel* (Ipswich, United Kingdom: Brechinset Publications, 1982). Some contend for a basic geographical outline. Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 401; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 3-5. Some scholars doubt the presence of a single, overarching structure. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:71-72; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 1-li; Nolland, *Matthew*, 44-62; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and*

proposal draws out identifiable features of the text. Throughout the Gospel, Matthew shows himself to be a skilled artist capable of interweaving complementary emphases, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the overall structure of his Gospel reflects this same competency.¹³⁴ Matthew injects strategic repetition into his story about Jesus that alternates between narrative and discourse within a geographically constrained narrative.

Within this macro-structure, the Gospel also reflects organization and patterns in smaller clusters of material. The organization of the birth narrative presents Jesus from his infancy as the new Moses.¹³⁵ The structure of chapters 8 and 9—with three groups of three miracle stories separated by incidents with a decided concern for discipleship— weaves together emphases including Christology, faith, and discipleship.¹³⁶ Davies and Allison detail Matthew’s fondness for organizing material in groups of three, especially prior to chapter 14.¹³⁷ As part of their review of repeated Matthean words, they also conclude that “the frequency of conditional, explanatory, and inferential conjunctions (e.g. γάρ, ἐάν, ὅπως, οὖν, ὡς καί, ὥστε; cf. also διὰ τοῦτο) reflects an orderly mind and implies that Matthew was well versed in the art of argumentation.”¹³⁸ David Bauer argues the material from Matthew 16:21 onward reflects a repetition of comparison and contrast climaxing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and he perceives that this organization

Theological Art (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 10-11.

¹³⁴ Schreiner prefers the alternation between narrative and discourse as a basic outline, but he proposes that the “outlines don’t need to be opposed to one another; they are different ways of looking at Matthew’s narrative structure” (Schreiner, *Matthew*, 211).

¹³⁵ France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 187-89; Schreiner, *Matthew*, 134-37; Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (1993; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 140-65.

¹³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 137; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 3.A, “Overview,” para. 6; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:5; France, *Matthew*, 299-302; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 195-96; Keener, *Matthew*, 258-59; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 27, “Introduction to Jesus’ Miracle Stories,” para. 3-4; Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 142; Turner, *Matthew*, 227.

¹³⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:62-72. See also Dale C. Allison Jr., “The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 3 (1987): 423-45.

¹³⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:80.

highlights Jesus's acceptance of his necessary death, his demand for his disciples to follow his example, and the disciples' ongoing failures to understand and follow fully.¹³⁹

Matthew's complementary communicative strategies—large and small, explicit and subtle—convey historical truth and his theological convictions. Reading a passage in the first Gospel well involves grappling with and grasping Matthew's use of these strategies throughout his tristranded cord.¹⁴⁰ As suggested by the diverse ways Matthew attends to heart-level dynamics, biblical counselors strive for faithfulness to Matthew's authoritative textual witness as they grow in recognizing and reading this Gospel with an awareness of its rich and multilayered communication.

Reading and Understanding Matthean Passages

Matthew's Gospel narrates Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, but through its strands, the Gospel communicates more than a factual story.¹⁴¹ Readers can approach texts from multiple angles in an effort to comprehend better an author's communication in any given portion of Scripture.¹⁴² Faithfully engaging any passage in Matthew's Gospel as Scripture involves at least three comingled strategies: examining the text, considering the context, and studying the strands.¹⁴³ In one sense, these strategies are successive: later steps build on earlier ones. Effective application of these strategies also

¹³⁹ Bauer, *Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, 96-108; cf. Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 127. Wiarda also identifies multiple strategies the Gospel writers use to draw out emphases through interconnected pericopes. Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 187-93; cf. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 189.

¹⁴⁰ Vanhoozer asserts that the act of understanding a written text is the task of "grasping what an author is doing in a text" (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 337).

¹⁴¹ France argues for both "surface meanings" and "bonus meanings" in his treatment of Matthew's formula quotations in the infancy narrative. R. T. France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication," *New Testament Studies* 27, no. 2 (1981): 241.

¹⁴² See Pennington's three "avenues" of reading Holy Scripture. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 109-20.

¹⁴³ Pennington also addresses the importance of "posture" (i.e., one's disposition to the text) when reading Scripture. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 136-39. This important aspect is treated herein in the next chapter on application.

recognizes that they spiral with an opposite-direction influence: later steps help sharpen, refine, and lead to additional observations in the earlier steps.¹⁴⁴ Comprehension of Matthew’s communication involves a dynamic use of these complementary strategies.

Examine the Text: Careful Reading

Careful reading begins with establishing where a passage starts and ends.¹⁴⁵ After establishing a focal text, the reader begins to attend to the text’s details, a process which starts with reading the passage multiple times.¹⁴⁶ Regardless of the passage’s form and content, careful engagement demands attentiveness to the passage’s vocabulary, grammar, and syntax—the basic building blocks of any textual communication.¹⁴⁷

Careful reading also requires “literary competence in order to understand different types of texts.”¹⁴⁸ Matthew’s communicative diversity calls for multifaceted literary competence. Carefully reading episodes involves attentiveness to the story’s literary strands. A faithful reader closely follows the basic details of the story (e.g., setting, plot, characters, and dialogue).¹⁴⁹ A wise reader also considers how Matthew tells his story, including his apparent attitude towards the characters, editorial comments,

¹⁴⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 32, 80, 139, 182.

¹⁴⁵ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 175.

¹⁴⁷ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 167; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 219; Osborne, *Matthew*, “Introduction,” *How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew*,” para. 3. Vanhoozer discusses how more basic elements of communication—words, utterances, etc.—contribute to more complex forms of communication (e.g., literary forms), and these more basic forms (i.e., “the ‘raw materials’ of literary acts”) must be examined with the interpretive tools appropriate to their form. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 310; 336; cf. 204, 336-50; Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 188-94.

¹⁴⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 337.

¹⁴⁹ See also Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 275-76; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 391-93; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 217-18; Osborne, *Matthew*, “Introduction,” “How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew,” para. 4, “Study the Plot at the Macro Level;” Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 172-80; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 8-20; Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 64-72; Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (1988; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 285-88.

narrative gaps, and his use of literary devices such as repetition, comparison, and contrast.¹⁵⁰ A careful reading of pronouncement stories explores the relationship between the historical event and the climactic pronouncement of Jesus and recognizes the priority of Jesus's declaration for reading and understanding the narrative.¹⁵¹

Where an account shifts to monologue and for longer segments of Jesus's teaching, the focus of careful reading examines Jesus's teaching according to how such texts communicate.¹⁵² Attentiveness to the story and discourse threads does not disappear given Matthew's overall narrative structure. However, when carefully reading Jesus's teaching, the reader should give primary attention to identifying main ideas and prominent themes, observing the structure and flow of the argument, and recognizing rhetorical devices (e.g., repetition, parallelism, etc.) and their role in the organization of the teaching.¹⁵³ Jesus's teaching in parables likewise demands diligence according to their form.¹⁵⁴ Careful reading in the Gospels entails both generally applicable exegetical principles as well as literary competence according to a passage's form. However, wisely and faithfully reading a Gospel passage does not end with careful reading.

¹⁵⁰ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 157. See also Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 158-62; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 276-78; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 289-95; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 195-98, 200-02; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 393-97; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 22-23; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 216-18; Osborne, *Matthew*, "Introduction," "How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew," para. 4; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 89-97; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 37-44, 53-75.

¹⁵¹ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 178; Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 381; cf. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 530-31.

¹⁵² Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 178.

¹⁵³ See Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 77-87; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 278-79; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 148-50; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 96-97.

¹⁵⁴ See Blomberg, *Interpreting Parables*, 170-327; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 286-88; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 156-67; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 524-28; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 208-18; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 435-48; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 26-29; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 291-311; Snodgrass, "Parable," 597-99; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 61-564; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 158-73; Stein, *Parables*, 72-81; Stein, *Method and Message*, 50-59.

Consider the Context: Contextual Reading

Contextual reading complements careful reading as a necessary aspect of exegeting any passage. Reading Matthean pericopes contextually treats episodes as more than beads on a string.¹⁵⁵ Contextual reading admits that grasping an author's communication requires reading any text as part of the larger work in which it occurs.

Contextual reading seeks to discern how Matthew uses interconnections, repetition, and alteration of features (e.g., vocabulary, themes, and character qualities) to enhance a passage's communication.¹⁵⁶ This type of reading applied to Jesus's teaching in the Gospels seeks to grasp the relationship between sentences, paragraphs, and the larger message within which those smaller units occur.¹⁵⁷ Contextual reading also strives to discern literary and thematic interconnections between episodes and Jesus's teaching.¹⁵⁸ Contextual reading examines how multiple episodes cooperatively communicate through shared and contrasting features.¹⁵⁹ Reading contextually looks for ways a single passage both draws from and contributes to repeated Matthean emphases.¹⁶⁰ Contextual reading also peers outside Matthew by horizontally reading parallel passages in other Gospels and accounting for character and conceptual overlaps

¹⁵⁵ Burrige, *Four Gospels*, 16; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 186.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 158; Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 37-38; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 297; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 198-200; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 93-94; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 20-36, 162-93.

¹⁵⁷ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 34, 81-88; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 26. See also Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 45-51.

¹⁵⁸ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 34-35; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 145-46; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 202-03.

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 158-60; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 24; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 185-89; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 162-74.

¹⁶⁰ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 214-25; Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 146-48; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 399-407; Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 38-39; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 297; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 193-95; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 40-45; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 189-92, 194-98; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 26; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 87-89.

between the Gospels.¹⁶¹ This aspect of reading also examines the communicative influence of quotations, references, and allusions to OT literature.¹⁶²

Reading a Matthean passage—whether an episode or portion of Jesus’s teaching—in relation to its literary context enhances understanding in no less than four ways. First, contextual reading helps readers comprehend a passage’s place in the evangelist’s overall presentation of the story about Jesus.¹⁶³ Second, perceiving a passage in its literary environment can help clarify an author’s use of particular words that possess a range of meaning.¹⁶⁴ Third and related, contextual reading can assist readers in addressing textual ambiguities and filling in narrative gaps.¹⁶⁵ Fourth, reading a passage in context helps draw out emphases and subtleties embedded within a passage. Such details come into sharper relief against the backdrop of other texts. In this way, contextual reading helps the faithful reader recognize communicative priorities in a text.¹⁶⁶ Without contextual reading, careful reading remains incomplete reading. However, ascribing context its rightful role is not the final spoke in reading’s wheel.

Study the Strands Together: Holistic Reading

Finally, a “thick” understanding of a passage’s communication also requires “holistic” reading.¹⁶⁷ Reading Matthew holistically recognizes the tri-stranded nature of

¹⁶¹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 140-44; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 297-99; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 22; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 192-94.

¹⁶² Blomberg, “Matthew,” 1-109; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 225-230; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*; Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, Cross, and Crown*, 89-98, 203-04; Schreiner, *Matthew*, 54-60.

¹⁶³ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 295-96.

¹⁶⁴ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 296-97; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 53-54.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 35-38; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 37-44.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 212-14; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 155-57; Stein, *Basic Guide*, 88-89.

¹⁶⁷ Drawing on philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s “thick descriptions” of human activity, Vanhoozer discusses interpretations as comparatively thick and thin based on the extent to which those interpretations

the Gospel and seeks the cooperative contributions of a passage's literary, historical, and theological strands.¹⁶⁸ Through holistic reading, readers do not treat a passage as only historical record, literary accomplishment, or theological repository. Instead, the reader strives to appreciate how the passage's historical, literary, and theological dimensions cooperatively contribute to a passage's communication.

Comprehending the literary aspect of a passage includes recognizing how Matthew uses literary strategies to interweave a passage's history and theology into the same strands stitched throughout the whole Gospel.¹⁶⁹ Comprehending the historical aspect includes approaching the passage as an historical witness and addressing nuances of language, historical context, and culture in that passage.¹⁷⁰ Grappling with the historical thread also overlaps with contextual reading in that sorting through a passage's historical aspects can involve horizontal reading of parallel passages.¹⁷¹ Comprehending the theological aspect includes ascertaining what a passage says or implies about Jesus and broader biblical and theological concerns, what is communicated through and about characters in a passage, and what values are positively or negatively (as well as explicitly

engage with what an author has done in a text. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 284-85; referencing Gilbert Ryle, "Thinking and Reflecting," in *Collected Papers* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 2:465-79; Ryle, "The Thinking of Thoughts: What is 'Le Penseur' Doing?" in *Collected Papers*, 2:480-496. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 291-92, 302, 305, 331-32. Presently, a "thick" understanding refers to the extent to which a reader comprehends how and what an author communicates through a text.

¹⁶⁸ In some ways, holistic reading brings together insights that come after readers spend time along each of Pennington's three avenues of reading. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 109-20.

¹⁶⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, "Introduction," "How to Study and Preach the Gospel of Matthew," "Study the Plot at the Macro Level;" Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 112-13.

¹⁷⁰ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 193-211; Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 43-59; Green, *How to Read the Gospels*, 69-80; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 299-305; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 312-24; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 93-143, 383-85, 575-602; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 162-187; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 37-39; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 111-12.

¹⁷¹ Pennington's caution applies to any attempts to "reconstruct" the historical event: "It is the interpretations provided by the evangelists—not our reconstruction of it or our thoughts on the significance of the event—that matter. The evangelists' interpretations of the events and their purposes purpose in writing should be our focus" (Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 150).

or implicitly) addressed in a passage.¹⁷² This aspect of holistic reading also involves reading passages in relation to other texts in the OT and NT corpus.¹⁷³

Reading a passage holistically requires readers to recognize that the historical elements, literary features, and theological assertions and commitments cooperate together. None of these components can be isolated from the others as the “true,” “primary,” or “core” dimension of the text. Instead, the inspired evangelist interweaves all three elements in the production of his inerrant text, and thus together the strands should be celebrated and respected in their contributions to the divinely inspired communication. Yet, holistic reading does not naively assume that each strand contributes equally in each passage or that the relative proportions remain constant across passages. In some cases, such as discourses, the literary and theological strands predominate, whereas the historical thread tends to exercise greater influence in episodes. Holistic reading—in cooperation with careful and contextual reading—anticipates, welcomes, and strives to understand the contributions of the strands to a passage’s communication.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Matthew is simple, narrating the story of Jesus’s earthly ministry, his substitutionary death, and his triumphant resurrection. And yet, Matthew’s Gospel is complex: a literary storehouse of historical and theological truth. The Gospel communicates through individual episodes, Jesus’s teaching, and the union of these elements in the carefully woven tapestry of the overarching narrative. Comprehending how and what this rich work and its individual passages communicate demands careful, contextual, holistic reading. However, bringing the Gospels to bear on counseling (and

¹⁷² Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 120-29; Green, *How to Read the Gospels*, 81-98; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 305-06; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 411, 693-720; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 219; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 114-16; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 58-96, 138-54, 206-216.

¹⁷³ Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 306; Köstenberger and Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 703-08; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 198-202; Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 216-28.

for other formative means) involves not only reading and understanding but also application and response.

CHAPTER 4
A METHOD FOR APPLYING THE GOSPEL
OF MATTHEW IN COUNSELING

Biblical counselors believe God’s Word actively guides counseling’s theory and practice. The Gospel of Matthew and the other three Gospels form a unique biblical genre, and each has unique contributions to make to counseling. As a tristranded cord, Matthew’s Gospel weaves together history, literature, and theology to tell a cohesive story about Jesus through the union of episodes from Jesus’s life and instances of Jesus’s teaching. Application of Matthew’s Gospel moves from understanding the Gospel’s communication to submission to its divinely-given authority—a movement that “may occur either through immediate insight or through the painstaking use of methods.”¹ Whether seamless or arduous, wise and discerning application described by six truths, consisting of three dimensions, and coupled with counseling’s framework provides a strategy for the faithful use of the Gospel of Matthew in counseling.

Describing Application

Six descriptions of application provide basic characterizations of application useful in uniting application’s three primary components with counseling’s framework. The conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:13-27) and Matthew’s use of the OT across his Gospel help draw out these six characteristics of application.

¹ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 27.

Application Is Necessary

First, biblical application is necessary. Jesus's final appeals in Matthew 7 emphasize the utter necessity for his hearers to practice what he preaches. The images of two gates and roads refer to the principles that guide one's life, or "two ways of being."² The final illustration of two builders distinguishes these ways of being by whether hearers practice ("do," ποιέω) Jesus's teaching (24-27).³ The earlier warnings also prioritize doing (or applying) via the repetition of ποιέω (17x2, 18x2, 19, 21, 22).⁴ In the eschatological snapshot, the reigning Jesus exposes and turns away those who failed to do the Father's will, especially the proclamation and practice (i.e., application) of Jesus's narrow-way teaching (13-23, cf. 24).⁵ Repeated warnings of judgment and destruction (13, 19, 23, 27) paired with promises of life and security (14, 25) emphasize that faithfulness to Jesus and his teaching necessitates applying that instruction to life.

Understanding God's Word remains incomplete without application: "A person does not understand Scripture, Scripture tells us, unless he can apply it to new situations, to situations not even envisaged in the original text (Matt 16:3; 22:29; Luke 24:25; John 5:39ff.; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16ff.; 2 Pet 1:19-21—in context)."⁶ For John Frame, application and theology are indistinguishable.⁷ Relatedly, Kevin Vanhoozer sees a necessary link between theology and application: "Christian doctrine is necessary for

² Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 272.

³ Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 282.

⁴ Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 275, 281-82.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 139.

⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 84. See also Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 27 and Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (1988; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 120; referencing Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989), 307-11.

⁷ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 81-85.

human flourishing: only doctrine shows us who we are, why we are here, and what we are to do.”⁸ Application cannot be assumed because consideration must be given to bridging the cultural and chronological gap between the biblical authors and modern readers.⁹ Through the Word written and incarnate, God directed his Word to specific moments and specific needs, and application must, therefore, enter intentionally into the divinely given Word and the present world to apply the ancient text to current concerns.¹⁰

Application Pursues Submission

Closely tied to application’s necessity, application actively pursues submission to God’s authority conveyed through his Word. At the Sermon’s close, Jesus delegitimizes the false prophets and their teaching (15-20) and puts forward his teaching as true and reliable (24-27; cf. 5:21-48). In this way, Jesus presents himself as the authoritative teacher to whom the disciples rightly and wisely submit.¹¹ Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’s authority rings again when the evangelist calls attention to the audience’s response to his Master’s teaching (28-29).¹² Jesus and Matthew implore readers to submit their lives to Jesus’s teaching and (by extension) the evangelist’s theological and historical testimony.

Application of any biblical text is a necessary effort to push for submission of a reader’s life to the authority invested in the text. Methods of interpretation and

⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), xiii.

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (1982; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 145.

¹⁰ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 145; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 183.

¹¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 296; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993), 190-91, Logos Bible Software.

¹² France, *Matthew*, 298-99; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 728, Logos Bible Software.

application matter, but a reader's disposition towards the text is also crucial. Multiple authors advocate the value of a submissive posture—a fundamental willingness to “stand under” the text as a servant and disciple rather than “stand over” the text as lord—when seeking to understand and apply the Scriptures.¹³ Application seeks to establish and communicate how a disposition of submission should manifest itself in a reader's life.

Application Concerns Transformation

Application also concerns specific ways the Bible results in a reader's personal transformation. This aspect of application also echoes from the Sermon's conclusion. Jesus's contrast between the gates and ways implies that the way of life towards which Jesus's directs his followers is a course they will not naturally follow but requires a change of direction (13-14).¹⁴ Those rebuked by Jesus chose their own path of mighty works rather than transformation after the pattern of the Father's communicated will (21-23).¹⁵ Similarly, building one's life after the pattern called for by Jesus reflects a change from the pattern pursued when Jesus's words are not heeded (24-27).¹⁶

Application's transformative pursuit derives from the transformative purpose for which God gave his Word (Ps 19:7-8; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16-17). So Vanhoozer observes: “The words of the Bible are not simply carriers of information but

¹³ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 66-68; Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 136-39; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 380-81, 401-07, 431-41; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Reader in New Testament Interpretation,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 282-83, Logos Bible Software. Pennington also cites Joel Green's advocacy for a posture of submission. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 137-38; referencing Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

¹⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:696.

¹⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 325.

¹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 26, “7:27,” para. 1 Kindle.

means of transformation.”¹⁷ The ideal reader of Scripture is not merely a knower but a disciple.¹⁸ Discipleship is transformation after the pattern set by Christ, and this patterning occurs only as Christ’s people apply his Word to their lives.¹⁹ Jonathan Pennington identifies a transformative motivation behind all four Gospels: “The nature of the Gospels as theological, testimonial, biographical history means that they make a claim on us, calling us to believe, trust, and follow Christ. Their purpose is not just information but transformation through the postresurrection witness to who God is for us in Christ Jesus.”²⁰ J. de Wall Dryden perceives that in their features—pericopes, Jesus’s teaching, and overall narrative arcs—the “Gospel narratives were written for spiritual formation.”²¹ Application of Matthew’s Gospel is the intentional effort to draw out transformative implications consistent with the evangelist’s inscripturated witness.

Application Makes Arguments

Application also makes arguments for what present submission to and transformation by Scripture looks like. Most simply, application can take the conditional form “If *X*, then *Y*,” where Scripture establishes the protasis *X* (e.g., an assertion to believe, a value to possess, an action to perform, etc.), and the apodosis *Y* follows as a particular manifestation of *X* in a reader’s life. The final elements of the first Matthean discourse suggests this form. Jesus denies kingdom entry to some despite their verbal

¹⁷ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 70; cf. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 380; cf. 368.

¹⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 381. See also Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 267.

¹⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 213-17.

²⁰ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 213-14. Pennington’s definition of a Gospel reflects this transformative intent: “Our canonical Gospels are the *theological, historical, and aretological (virtue-forming) biographical narratives that retell the story and proclaim the significance of Jesus Christ, who through the power of the Spirit is the Restorer of God’s reign*” (Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 35).

²¹ J. de Wall Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 162.

confessions and miraculous deeds because they have failed to do the Father's will (21-23), which includes application of Jesus's teaching (24-27).²² The Father's will revealed in all Scripture is the necessary condition of application's argument. Application then seeks to establish how the reader ought to move to the consequent of humble submission.

Logical arguments appear anytime God's Word is interpreted and applied.²³ Regardless of form or setting, application's argument combines "biblical knowledge with information about our situations."²⁴ Admittedly, "Scripture doesn't speak specifically to every detail of human life, even of life in the church."²⁵ As the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) accurately articulates, biblically informed arguments are the means by which "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life . . . may be deduced from Scripture" (WCF 1.6). Accordingly, Frame examines various types of arguments (e.g., conditional arguments, syllogisms, and analogies) used in application.²⁶ Though past abuses have given casuistry a bad name (e.g., Matt 15:3-6), both Frame and Daniel Doriani recognize a properly constrained role for this approach to deducing Scripture's application in specific situations.²⁷ Logical arguments are also required when taking stock of chronological and

²² Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, 139-40.

²³ For argumentation in preaching, see Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 244. For an example of reasoning in counseling's application, see Jay E. Adams, *The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 88.

²⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 230.

²⁵ Frame, *Word of God*, 224.

²⁶ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 242-301; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 166-68.

²⁷ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 128-30; Daniel M. Doriani, "A Redemptive-Historical Model," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 99-102, Kindle. Frame prefers "the term *application* to the term *casuistry*. But in fact we should recognize that, by whatever name, casuistry is unavoidable" (Frame, *Christian Life*, 234). For Frame's proposed constraints, see Frame, *Christian Life*, 235.

cultural factors in both interpretation and application.²⁸

Furthermore, application's argument is not always unidirectional. Scripture governs the rules of application's road, but application's initial movements are often bidirectional: "Some interpreters think their task is one-directional, moving only from a text to an audience. But wise interpreters move the other way too, mediating the questions of their audience to the Bible. . . . Thus interpreters can begin either with points the text generates, or with the questions people bring to it."²⁹ Putting questions to the biblical text and arguing for answers based on biblical evidence is central to application.³⁰

Application Involves Creativity

Application's arguments demonstrate the overlap of the ancient world of the text with the present world of the reader.³¹ Discerning this overlap demands creativity.

²⁸ For interaction with other proposals and suggested criteria for arguments intended to move horizontally from the world of the text to the world of the reader, see Mark L. Strauss, "A Reflection," in Meadors, *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible*, 293-97; Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 210-34, Kindle. For examples of using arguments to employ a vertical or "principalizing" movement in making application, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "A Principalizing Model," in Meadors, *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible*, 19-50; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (1981; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 149-63; Jack Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 54-63; Haddon W. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: It's when We're Applying Scripture that Error Is Most Likely to Creep in," interview by Edward K. Rowell, *Leadership* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1997), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1997/fall/714020.html>; and Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 107-08, 201-02.

²⁹ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82; cf. Michael R. Emler, *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 17, Kindle.

³⁰ See Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 97-121, Doriani, "Redemptive-Historical Model," 102-30; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 220-23; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 214-22; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 183. See also the roles questions play in the first two steps of the four-step method for application presented in William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 2017), 611-628, Logos Bible Software.

³¹ Brown calls the overlap of these two worlds "contextualization," her preferred term for application. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 241. Brown also notes that Walter Brueggemann conceives a third world created when the author's and reader's worlds overlap: the "third world of evangelical imagination" (Brown, 241; quoting Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991], 12).

Scholars perceive Matthew’s creativity in his use of the OT, his own eyewitness testimony, and other materials available to him.³² Following C. H. Dodd, Patrick Schreiner contends Matthew’s creativity, especially in relating Jesus to the OT, originated with Jesus.³³ Via imagination, readers explore how two seemingly unrelated objects (e.g., ancient text and modern concerns) possess consequential relationships. Metaphors convey imagination’s connections “when [metaphors] bring together two previously unrelated semantic fields.”³⁴ Analogies—a frequent tool in application’s argument—also make imaginative associations.³⁵ Though some view imagination negatively, application cannot escape the use of God-given imagination.³⁶ Frame argues that creativity—propelled by a commitment to *sola Scriptura*—appears in the work of former faculty members at Westminster Theological Seminary, including Jay Adams.³⁷ Creativity and imagination are not dangers to fear but gifts to steward. Like every aspect of life, creativity was marred by the fall and must be shaped by Scripture to aid application.³⁸

Some biblical content lends itself to imagination’s creativity. Doriani identifies narrative, imagery, and songs as forms by which Scripture “appeals to the heart and

³² Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 27, 32, 56-57, 83; cf. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989; Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 183; Graham N. Stanton, “Matthew as a Creative Interpreter of the Sayings of Jesus” in *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 326-345.

³³ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 61; referencing C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Fontana, 1952), 109-10.

³⁴ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 281.

³⁵ Frame, *Christian Life*, 356; Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 226-32.

³⁶ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 340-43; Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 37.

³⁷ Frame, *Word of God*, 577-79.

³⁸ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 342.

imagination.”³⁹ In addition to narrative, Vanhoozer cites metaphors and apocalyptic literature.⁴⁰ Pennington recognizes story’s capacity to stoke imagination and, in so doing, have a “transformative power” different from that of “abstract reflection and doctrine.”⁴¹ Drawing from Leland Ryken, Pennington argues that good stories, like Gospel pericopes and narratives, invite readers to use their imagination to experience the world of the story before moving beyond it.⁴² Application’s arguments require the engagement of the redeemed imagination to guide present-day submission to the ancient text, and Matthew’s Gospel (as a form of narrative) is tailor-made to stoke applicatory creativity.

Application Has Multiple Methods

Readers legitimately employ multiple methods to gather biblical data for application’s arguments. By his diverse application of the OT, Matthew demonstrates multi-faceted application in two ways. First, his fulfillment quotations sometimes highlight the fulfillment of predictive messianic prophecy (12:17-21; 21:4-5, cf., 2:5-6), but they also show how “Jesus fills up, completes, perfects the history of Israel” (2:15, 17-18; 13:35; cf. 5:17).⁴³ Second, Matthew goes beyond fulfillment quotations with a range of allusions and shadow stories.⁴⁴

³⁹ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 93; cf. 263, 278.

⁴⁰ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 280-85.

⁴¹ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 46.

⁴² Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 179-80; quoting Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 17, 23.

⁴³ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 44; cf. 38-44. In this discussion, Schreiner refers to Pennington’s “fulfilment spectrum,” a range of ways the OT writings are related to Jesus. Schreiner, *Matthew*, 40; referencing Jonathan Pennington, review of *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Divine Mystery*, by G. K. Beale and Benjamin Gladd (paper presented at the 67th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 2015).

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Matthew*, 54-57; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 109, Kindle; Donald Senior, “The Lure of the Formula Quotations: Re-assessing Matthew’s Use of the Old Testament with the Passion Narrative as a Test-Case,” in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1997), 89, 115.

Present day application of Scripture likewise consists of multiple ways of merging the text and life.⁴⁵ First, readers go to Scripture seeking warrant for a predetermined position or action. Second, application is pursued through specific topical study of a brief passage, the entire canon, or some other amount of text. Third, biblical application can occur in moments of spontaneous reflection (less method than other approaches described here, and more a spontaneous experience). Fourth, readers can focus on a particular passage, not with a specific topical concern, but intending to identify principles, ideas, themes, commands, etc. with a goal to identify application consistent with textual observations. Fifth, application comes progressively through the ongoing shaping effect of regularly engaging God's Word.⁴⁶ Each approach has strengths and weaknesses and can be pursued legitimately and illegitimately. While the first and third approaches may be more prone to treating Scripture like a proverbial wax nose, the others are not exempt from distortion or misuse. Recognizing application as an argument coupled with care to avoid fallacious argumentation helps to reduce the likelihood of abuse and error when using these methods to move towards application.

Application is the necessary means by which readers seek to stand under the authority of God's Word. This pursuit of submission requires arguments to move from the text to application and from life's concerns into the text and back out to application. Regardless of the form or direction of application's movement, the work of application is a three dimensional activity that involves the Scripture, circumstances, and the reader.

⁴⁵ The much-maligned practice of proof-texting is not distinguished here as a separate approach to application, since it can be used as part of multiple approaches described below, especially the first two. As Frame discusses, proof-texting has a rightful role when used judiciously. Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 197; Frame, *Word of God*, 574. See also Michael R. Allen and Scott R. Swain, "In Defense of Proof-Texting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 3 (2011): 589-606.

⁴⁶ Devotional reading is closely associated with these final two approaches to application, as is Pennington's description of the "Whatever Strikes Me" (WSM) hermeneutic (Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 139-42, 169-71).

Dimensions of Wise and Discerning Application

By leveraging its multiple methods, faithful biblical application necessarily and creatively makes arguments to implement the Bible's calls for submission and transformation of recipients in present circumstances. Three critical components—text, circumstance, and recipient—correspond to application's three interconnected dimensions: the normative, situational, and existential dimensions.⁴⁷

Before considering these dimensions, clarity for considering application in counseling requires recognizing counselors' dual citizenship with respect to application. Those guiding others should first submit themselves and their labors to Scripture's authority.⁴⁸ For counselors, submission includes how the Scripture informs and guides counseling's methods (see chapter 2). To disregard this element of application would be hypocritical (Matt 23:2-4). Counselors also function as mediators who demonstrate how God's Word applies in the lives of counselees. In what follows, counselors are primarily viewed and assumed in their mediating role, though the two roles never fully decouple.

Application and the Biblical Text: Application's Normative Dimension

Faithful application recognizes Scripture as the normative standard for all

⁴⁷ This approach to application derives from Frame's epistemological triperspectivalism. Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 73-75, 89-90, 169-346; John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), Kindle. He identifies three interrelated perspectives—normative, situational, and existential—from which to view reality. Frame, *Three Dimensions*, 25. All three elements are involved in any ethical decision: "Every ethical decision involves the application of a law (norm, principle) to a situation by a person (self)" (Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 74). These perspectives are ultimately inseparable: "All knowledge also is a knowledge of the world, since all our knowledge (of God or the world) comes through created media. And all knowledge is of self, because we know all things by means of our own experience and thoughts. The three kinds of knowledge, then, are identical but 'perspectivally' related; they represent the same knowledge, viewed from three different 'angles' or 'perspectives'" (Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 89). Frame describes counseling perspectivally: "The individual and the Scripture are part of the situation, the situation and the Scripture are parts of the person's experience, and an analysis of the situation and person helps to show us what Scripture says (i.e., how it applies in this case)" (Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 74).

⁴⁸ Kevin Carson, "The Personal, Private, and Public Ministry of the Word," in *CCBC*, ed. James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 264-65; cf. Robert Smith, "Spiritual Discipline and the Biblical Counselor," in *CHCB*, ed. John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 88-97.

aspects of application. Consequently, application requires sound interpretation.⁴⁹

Applying Matthew's Gospel begins with understanding via careful, contextual, and holistic reading, but understanding does not complete the textual element of application.

Beyond understanding. Most texts (including Matthew) exist due to an author's (or editor's) desire to affect their readers beyond understanding.⁵⁰ The textually evident purpose(s) for which an author wrote is not insignificant when applying a text.⁵¹ Adams notably emphasized the priority of purpose (or "*telos*," his preferred term) for any text's use in preaching and counseling.⁵² However, there are limits to a reader's capacity to know an author's (divine or human) intentions for a text.⁵³ Furthermore, R. T. France's reservations are apropos: "How many books are ever written with just one purpose in

⁴⁹ In keeping with their commitments to biblical inspiration and authority, biblical counselors value faithful interpretation as the basis for biblical application. Emler, *CrossTalk*, 3-4; Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 14; Bob Kellemen, "The Bible Is Relevant for That?" in *SC*, ed. Robert W. Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 181; Steve Viars and Rob Green, "The Sufficiency of Scripture," in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 103-05. As Robert Jones observes, when Scripture is mishandled, two interpretive errors are committed: "sins of commission (teaching what it does not say) and interpretive sins of omission (not teaching what it does say)" (Robert Jones, "Biblically Accurate Biblical Counseling," Biblical Counseling Coalition [Blog], May 21, 2014, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2014/05/21/biblically-accurate-biblical-counseling/>).

⁵⁰ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 375.

⁵¹ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 199; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 173; Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 611.

⁵² Adams contends that preachers "should uncover the purpose of the passage: what the Holy Spirit intends to do to the listener from it" (Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 38). For Adams, that purpose is of utmost importance. Adams, *Use of Scriptures*, 198; Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 25. According to Adams, the *telos* of a passage is "the purpose that the Holy Spirit had when He 'moved' the writer to pen the words of the passage. That purpose was *broader* than the immediate purpose in the writer's mind when writing to a particular person or church" (Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 27-28). Exegeting a passage while possessing a "*telic* concern," being alert to "*telic cues*," and "looking for *telic* thrusts and emphases," are among Adams's suggestions for how counselors (and pastors) should identify any passage's purpose (Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 31-33; cf. Adams, *Use of Scriptures*, 27-30).

⁵³ Adams neglects this limitation: "When I say that the intention of the Holy Spirit must be discovered, I do not mean merely His intention *in its limited application* to an event at the time when the passage was written, but any and all valid applications that He intended to make from any principles that may be generalized from the basic thrust of the passage" (Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 28). Frame's admissions are preferable: "There is also a sense in which the text's purpose is indefinite. We cannot not predict all the uses to which the text may legitimately be put" (Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 199).

mind? How many authors are able, or would wish, so to discipline their writing that the whole document is single-mindedly directed to one specific goal?”⁵⁴ Instead, it may be conceded “that Matthew had a number of very clear ‘bees in his bonnet,’ themes which would be bound to emerge in anything he wrote.”⁵⁵ At best,

Matthew’s ‘book about Jesus’ was written to say the things about Jesus which Matthew believed to be important and was ‘angled’ at various points towards particular views or situations to which he felt he had something to say. But is there any reason to doubt that he designed it, in so far as his own horizons allowed, to communicate to *anyone*, Christian or non-Christian, who might wish to know more about Jesus, and into whose hands it might fall, or who might be present to hear it read in a gathering of the church?⁵⁶

Though there is a limit to what can be known about Matthew’s purposes for his Gospel and individual portions of his Gospel, submission to Scripture’s authority requires that readers neither transgress, deny, nor dismiss any discernable purposes for which he wrote. Speech act theory, as applied to written speech, distinguishes three separate acts associated with any text: the author’s act of communicating (i.e., the “locution”), what the author did by that act (i.e., the “illocution”), and the reader’s act of response the author sought to evoke (i.e., the “perlocution”).⁵⁷ The normative dimension of application

⁵⁴ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 120.

⁵⁵ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 121.

⁵⁶ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 121.

⁵⁷ Brown provides a brief but helpful introduction to the language and basics of speech act theory. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 32-35. For examples of various theologians, philosophers, and biblical scholars employing speech act theory for describing the Bible’s communicative action (in addition to works cited below), see Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 203-04; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 244-47; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 23; Gregg Allison, “Speech Act Theory and Its Implications for the Doctrine of the Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture” (paper presented at the 45th annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Tysons Corner, VA, November 18-20, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.2986/tren.ETS-4542>; Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 305; Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Actions: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2001); Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 272-312; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 49-104; Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 75-105; Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 56-60; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Promise of Speech-act

accounts for all three acts. Understanding Matthew’s locutionary intent (i.e., what he communicated with the words he used) comes with careful reading’s exegesis reinforced by contextual and holistic reading.⁵⁸

Illocutions—what communicators themselves do with their words—are the heart of communicative action.⁵⁹ With their words, authors assert truth, ask questions, command readers, make promises, and perform other illocutionary acts.⁶⁰ The inspiration of Scripture renders the biblical authors’ illocutions invaluable: “As the biblical writers instruct, command, warn, assure, and testify, we hear the speech-acts of God to instruct, command, warn, assure, and testify.”⁶¹ Submission to Matthew’s Gospel is predicated on pursuing the evangelist’s illocutionary acts via careful, contextual, and holistic reading.⁶²

As discussed in chapter 3, Matthew communicates at multiple levels by multiple means across his Gospel. At each communicative level, the evangelist illocutes.⁶³ At the fundamental level, Matthew’s Gospel runs on assertions of narrated history (1:18; 2:1; etc.). Matthew also leverages the speech acts of others (with their illocutions), especially those of Jesus (4:17; 5:2ff.; etc.), and through Matthew’s reporting of both episodes and Jesus’s teaching, those speech acts become part of the evangelist’s

Theory for Biblical Interpretation,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics 2, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 73-90.

⁵⁸ See Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 48, 49; Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 177-79.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 33; Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 173.

⁶⁰ See William Alston’s extensive list of representative illocutions in William P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 34, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

⁶¹ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 267.

⁶² Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 182-84. For the place of disagreements about illocutions in interpretive debates, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 236; Richard S. Briggs, “Speech-Act Theory,” in *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory*, ed. David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2008), 90.

⁶³ See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 340-41.

communicative action.⁶⁴ Through Jesus’s theological and ethical instruction, Matthew instructs. Through the commands of Jesus, Matthew commands. Through the warnings of Jesus, Matthew warns. Through the promises of Jesus, the divinely inspired evangelist promises. Through the confessions of reliable characters, the evangelist confesses.

The Gospel writer also communicatively acts through the discourse thread of his pericopes and overall narrative. Vanhoozer contends that through their narratives authors like Matthew perform “a real illocutionary act: not the act of asserting, but rather the act of *displaying* a state of affairs.”⁶⁵ Matthew not only reports events with historical accuracy, but he simultaneously displays those events and their participants—especially Jesus—according to the values, convictions, and commitments the evangelist intends to promote. Matthew illocutes through his inscribed perspective on the characters and events about which he writes: “Texts, in other words, not only display a world but communicate a way of viewing it: ‘*Much like the biblical parable, the novel’s basic illocutionary activity is ideological instruction; its basic plea: hear my word, believe and understand.*’”⁶⁶ Matthew, like the other evangelists, also advocates his priorities through the cross-culminating shape of his narrative: “The shape of the narrative itself imprints a normative ethical vision on its readers.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Briggs’s survey of speech acts in Scripture includes observations about various ways authors incorporate historical speech acts (e.g., prayers, sermons, etc.) into their written communicative action. Briggs, “Speech-Act Theory,” 76-81.

⁶⁵ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 227; referencing Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 136. See also Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 283-84.

⁶⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 227; quoting Susan Snaider Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7. See also Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 284.

⁶⁷ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 123.

Following Matthew's leadership. Authors typically write in order to lead their audience to accept authors' assertions, obey their commands, trust their promises, or to a response that accords with the author's illocutionary acts.⁶⁸ Vanhoozer contends that truly understanding any text requires recognizing the author's illocutionary act and being willing to follow a text's perlocutions "at least part of the way."⁶⁹ Readers sometimes oblige.⁷⁰ Occasionally authors make plain (at least some of) their perlocutionary goals (e.g., Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31).⁷¹ However, such intentions must often be inferred. For the Gospel of Matthew to norm application, readers must respond by following the evangelist not simply "part of the way" but wherever his illocutions lead: "In short, the ideal reader of Scripture must be a disciple."⁷² This generalized discipleship-oriented view of perlocutionary response accords with Matthew's explicit and implicit emphasis on discipleship. By his illocutionary acts (e.g., asserting, instructing, etc.), Matthew beckons his readers to follow him as he follows Jesus: to believe assertions, to heed warnings, to follow arguments, to view themselves and the world in relation to Jesus, to adopt a set of kingdom values, and to dispense with anything that runs counter. Matthew's textual actions establish the direction readers follow in the pursuit of faithful application.⁷³

Application and Circumstances: Application's Situational Dimension

Application's normative dimension directs the task of application, but that task

⁶⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 375. Following an author's lead is part of the existential dimensions of application, a reminder that the dimensions cannot be fully separated.

⁶⁹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 376.

⁷⁰ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 255; Alston, *Illocutionary Acts*, 37; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 33.

⁷¹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 224.

⁷² Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 381.

⁷³ See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 375-76.

remains incomplete until Scripture norms the situational and existential dimensions. Application's second dimension—the situational dimension—is best understood first by description and then in relationship to the Scriptures which norm it.

The situational dimension described. Application's situational dimension concerns the set of circumstances—the context—in which a respondent seeks to submit to God's textually mediated authority. Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, readers can discern aspects of the situational dimension. Jesus's followers must apply his teaching to the circumstances of their lives (7:24). Two paths to follow—the wide and the narrow—exist and end in different circumstances (7:13-14). False teachers are real obstacles to faithfulness (7:15). A future accounting awaits (7:21). Situational considerations are a key element in determining application through casuistry.⁷⁴

In Frame's epistemology, the situational perspective corresponds to facts about reality.⁷⁵ Application's situational element includes any circumstantial detail—seen or unseen, recognized or unrecognized—consequential for an instance of application, including but not limited to facts from and about Scripture and the person seeking to submit to Scripture's authority. This component includes facts about individuals, including their relationships with one another (e.g., familial, congregational, etc.). The situational includes facts about actions and responses of individuals to one another and to their broader circumstances. It includes historical facts—past, present, and future (in so far as future facts can be known). The situational element includes material facts available through the five senses or measurable in the physical realm, as well as facts about visible and invisible reality known to mankind only through God's special revelation. This aspect includes both transcendent truths as well as specific facts about

⁷⁴ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 128.

⁷⁵ Frame, *Three Dimensions*, 22-23, 53.

time and space circumstances. Thus, the situational element includes doctrinal truths asserted by and deduced from Scripture. The situational includes diverse “areas of human life to which Scripture may be applied. Scripture wants us to apply it to business, politics, music, the arts, economics, and science, as well as to preaching worship, evangelism, and so forth.”⁷⁶ Jeremy Pierre distinguishes between four aspects of experience’s context: God, self, others, and circumstances.⁷⁷ All four factor into the situational dimension. Similarly, the situational side appears in the four key components—heat, thorns, cross, and fruit—of Timothy Lane’s and Paul Tripp’s counseling framework, with the “heat” and “cross” aspects especially focused on contextual concerns (see below).⁷⁸

In any instance of biblical application, there is no fact—abstract or concrete—that exists outside application’s situational dimension.⁷⁹ Admittedly, only God comprehensively knows application’s situation.⁸⁰ Application does not require exhaustive knowledge about a situation (otherwise application would be an unreachable ideal). Instead, mature and powerful application possesses “the aptness, relevance, and realism of *situational specificity*.”⁸¹ Rather than dealing exclusively in abstractions, wise application confidently seeks Scripture’s normative leadership in the specifics of life. Simultaneously, mankind’s finitude in relation to application’s situation should yield a measure of “epistemic humility” when applying Scripture to those specifics.⁸²

⁷⁶ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 205.

⁷⁷ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 101.

⁷⁸ Timothy S Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2008), 83.

⁷⁹ For the categories of abstract and concrete, see Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 179-85.

⁸⁰ The same is true for application’s normative and existential dimensions.

⁸¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 216.

⁸² Similarly, see Vanhoozer’s advocacy of both interpretive confidence and humility. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 462-67.

The situational dimension and Scripture. Faithful engagement with the situational dimension requires the norming influence of Scripture, and Scripture relates to application's situational dimension in various ways. Scripture is simultaneously part of the situational dimension (i.e., the existence of Scripture is a circumstantial fact), the revelatory source of otherwise unknowable facts about the situational dimension, and the final norm against which all knowledge about the situational is evaluated.⁸³ While Scripture is not exclusively propositional revelation (e.g., it expresses commands and questions), it is certainly not less.⁸⁴ Scripture reveals a vast array of otherwise imperceptible truths about God and his creation.⁸⁵ Bryan Chapell emphasizes how Scripture informs the doctrinal elements of application's situation by focusing on how passages address humanity's fallen condition and God's redemptive purposes in a text.⁸⁶ Pennington follows a similar approach for the Gospels.⁸⁷

Because of God's authority and Scripture's perfections, God's written revelation is the normative standard against which situational facts should be evaluated. Facts—regardless of the means by which they are known—are also norms since they are to be believed as an accurate description the reality to which they refer.⁸⁸ However, God's Word is the ultimate norm of any extrabiblical fact—whether such facts are viewed perspectively as norms or facts.⁸⁹ Scripture—as application's chief normative

⁸³ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 215.

⁸⁴ Frame, *Word of God*, 162, 360; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 276.

⁸⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (1979; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 3:272; cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 19-20.

⁸⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 212, 303.

⁸⁷ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 221.

⁸⁸ Frame, *Three Dimensions*, 60-61.

⁸⁹ Frame, *Word of God*, 593. See also Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 81-82; Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser, rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T.

element—provides the governing perspective on every aspect of the situational dimension that it addresses.⁹⁰

Application and the Person: Application's Existential Dimension

Though crucial for application, the normative and situational dimensions also require the existential dimension to complete application. Like the situational component, application's existential dimension is best understood first in its basic features and then in its relationship to Scripture.

The existential dimension described. Submission to God's revelation in Scripture within a complex situational matrix requires responding to Scripture's direction. This response to the Father's will is of no small concern as the Sermon concludes (7:13-27). Correspondingly, the existential dimension of application focuses on a person's response to God and his creation. Tripp distinguishes between the situation or circumstances of a person's life (i.e., what pertains to the situational dimension of application) and "entry gates" into personal ministry or "a particular person's *experience* of the situation, problem, or relationships."⁹¹ The existential element of application focuses on this experiential component. In his approach to the existential perspective of knowledge, Frame considers the personal aspects of knowing an object (especially God as the primary object of theological reflection) and particularly acknowledges the role the heart, as well as the theologian's character and personal capacities (e.g., reason, perception and experience, emotions, imagination, and intuition).⁹² Application's

Lehman, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament 2* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 107.

⁹⁰ Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 205.

⁹¹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 126-27.

⁹² Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 319-46.

existential dimension includes the experience of knowing biblical truth and facts about reality, but it extends beyond knowing to experiencing the world of biblical truth and facts. The existential focus in application addresses the totality of the existential experience of a person as a psychosomatic unity.

The heart—a summary term for multiple ways Scripture refers to the location of humanity’s internal experience—is central to each person’s experience, and thus the heart is central to application’s existential dimension.⁹³ Multiple authors have considered the role and importance of the human heart, especially in counseling (see chapter 2). Surveying how the Bible describes the heart, Pierre perceives three classical heart operations: cognition, affection, and volition.⁹⁴ Rather than separable activities, these operations are “different perspectives on the same, singular function.”⁹⁵ For an individual, these operations are experienced as beliefs, desires (or values), and commitments (or priorities). Just as the operations are perspectives on a singular function and thus ultimately inseparable, so also the experiences of believing, desiring, and committing cannot be entirely distinguished.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Pierre (taking a cue from Nicholas Wolterstorff) contends that people possess these experiences in a “complex (and often inconsistent)” framework influenced by “control beliefs,” “control values,” and “control commitments.”⁹⁷ Control beliefs, values, and commitments then influence how

⁹³ See Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 14, 240n3; Jeremy Pierre, “‘Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart’: The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 24-78.

⁹⁴ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 14-22; cf. Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 322-23.

⁹⁵ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 17; cf. Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 329.

⁹⁶ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 17.

⁹⁷ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 39, 41; referencing Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 68. Pierre defines control beliefs as “the core convictions that carry most influence over all other beliefs—organizing them and making sense of their relationship to one another” (Pierre, 39). On the matter of control beliefs, it is worth noting that for Wolterstorff such beliefs are not a fixed set within an overall framework of belief. Instead, the label “control” is a reference to how they function on a given occasion. Wolterstorff, 69-70. About control values (or desires), Pierre writes, “Just as people have controlling beliefs, they also have control desires. There are

the overall network of beliefs, desires, and commitments functions and expresses itself internally as interpretations (or thoughts), feelings, and choices. These internal expressions produce responses of words, emotions, and actions.⁹⁸ The existential dimension of application attends to this kaleidoscope of subjective experience.

The existential dimension and Scripture. As with the situational dimension, attention to application's existential dimension does not set Scripture aside, since Scripture is 1) personally experienced in reading and reflection, 2) a source for otherwise unknowable details about the existential dimension, and 3) the norm against which all existential experience is evaluated and understood. At the intersection of application's normative and existential dimensions, Scripture instructs and guides our complex array of internal and external responses, establishing a body of beliefs to guide thinking, interpretation, and understanding.⁹⁹ God's Word addresses human desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities. God's Word concerns itself with all manner of actions, emotions, and speech. The Scriptures penetrate the depths of human experience.¹⁰⁰ In addition to advocating, prohibiting, and otherwise guiding a diverse

many spheres of desires, some more important and some less, some related to one another and others less so" (Pierre, 42). About control commitments, he observes, "Human commitments form a sort of web or interrelation. Some are strong and some weak, some deeper and some shallower, some permanent and some temporary. Just as people have control beliefs and control desires, so they have control commitments that influence and organize lesser commitments" (Pierre, 45).

⁹⁸ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 47.

⁹⁹ Doctrine—as an expression of Scripture's teaching (normative) about reality (situational) and thus establishing truths that should be believed (existential)—is a substantial form of application. For theology and doctrine as application, see Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 81; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 347, 374. For doctrine's influence on other expressions of application, see Barrett, *God's Word Alone*, 146; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 226-43; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 466; Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 18; cf. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 382, 392; Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds*, 66-67.

¹⁰⁰ Kevin Carson, "The Richness and Relevance of God's Word," in Kellemen and Forrey, *SC*, 29-30.

range of specific responses, Scripture helps explain the existential dimension's situational elements (e.g., facts about the heart's dynamic functions, etc.).¹⁰¹

Multiple treatments of preaching advocate for preaching directed toward the heart and the heart's concerns.¹⁰² Chapell acknowledges that "application may be attitudinal as well as behavioral."¹⁰³ Looking specifically at the four Gospels, Pennington's FC ("fallen condition") and VF ("virtue formation") elements in his approach to applying Gospel narratives address existential concerns.¹⁰⁴ Looking beyond the cultivation of knowledge, Dryden likewise observes existential guidance in both didactic and narrative portions of the Gospels, guidance which leads readers in fostering "Right ARM"—right actions, right reasons, and right motivations.¹⁰⁵

Doriani's approach to application instructs readers to look for Scripture's guidance in four areas: duty, character, goals, and discernment.¹⁰⁶ As Doriani defines and employs these areas, each overlaps with the existential dimension of application as described above.¹⁰⁷ Frame perceives the first three categories—duty, character, and goals—as ethical principles associated with the normative, existential, and situational

¹⁰¹ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 14-22; Pierre, "'Trust in the Lord,'" 24-78.

¹⁰² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 717-32; Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (2015; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2016) 157-87; Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013), 25-41; Josh Moody and Robin Weeks, *Burning Hearts: Preaching to the Affections* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014).

¹⁰³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 210.

¹⁰⁴ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels*, 221.

¹⁰⁵ Dryden, *Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 106, 123-29.

¹⁰⁶ Doriani derives these categories from the way ethicists have "organized the moral questions people have" (Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 97). Specifically he cites Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 35-65; and Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 15-45. See also Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 319-20.

¹⁰⁷ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 103, 105, 110, 113.

perspectives, respectively.¹⁰⁸ Moral discernment, however, concerns the decision-making process (i.e., how a person discerns the application of duty, character, and goals).¹⁰⁹

What Scripture normatively establishes as an existential “ought”—what a person ought to believe, how that person ought to interpret their circumstances, what desires ought to be uppermost in a person’s affections, what a person ought or ought not to say, etc.—establishes a network of duties consisting of a wide-reaching set of beliefs, values, priorities, commitments, actions, words etc. Accordingly, Scripture leads readers to set fostering such responses—recall Pennington’s VF and Dryden’s Right ARM—as goals, and consistent realization of these responses constitutes Christian character. Biblically derived duty, goals, and character are not separable categories of application but different perspectives on the Bible’s existential guidance.¹¹⁰ By discernment (and its close relative wisdom), readers bring application’s three dimensions together in an effort to submit to the ancient text in modern life.

Three-Dimensional Application with Discernment and Wisdom

Three-dimensional application strives to engage its three dimensions with discernment and wisdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. In legitimate application, the normative dimension established from the biblical text assesses or guides existential response in the context of a particular setting. For example, Scripture rules out of bounds a parent yelling in anger at a child over accidentally spilling milk (Eph 4:29; 6:4; Col 3:21), while it would validate as “fitting the occasion” that same parent yelling to arrest the child’s attention in the threat of an oncoming vehicle (Eph 4:29).

¹⁰⁸ Frame, *Christian Life*, 49-51.

¹⁰⁹ Frame, *Christian Life*, 356-59.

¹¹⁰ Frame discusses the perspectival consistency between these three principles. Frame, *Christian Life*, 51-52.

Christ's people cannot know and codify in advance all potential applications of Scripture's ethical guidance.¹¹¹ Instead, believers exercise an existential couplet—discernment and wisdom—to perceive and pursue biblically-normed responses within a set of properly interpreted circumstances. Frame considers “the process of application [as] the subjective experience of applying God's Word to circumstances,” which requires “moral discernment” or “the ability to *see* the circumstances *in light of* biblical principles.”¹¹² In this description, the faculty of discernment involves the three dimensions: normative (“biblical principles”), situational (“the circumstances”), and existential (“see”). A few pages earlier, he also states about wisdom: “Wisdom is the ability to do the right thing in difficult situations (Luke 21:14-15), especially to say the right thing (Acts 6:10; 1 Cor 2:6 [cf. vv. 1, 4, 13]; 12:8; Col 1:28; 2 Pet 3:15).”¹¹³ Again, application's three dimensions emerge: normative (what is “right”), situational (“difficult situations”), and existential (“do” and “say”). Discernment is the capacity to see the way forward, and wisdom is the capacity to act accordingly.¹¹⁴ Vanhoozer describes application of doctrine as involvement in God's redemptive “theo-drama” and envelopes the capacity for perceptive and active responses within “wisdom”: “the ability to perceive and to participate rightly in the order of creation and in its reordering in Christ through the Spirit.”¹¹⁵ Thus, faithful application involves following the normative guidance of God's Word to comprehend situational details correctly and to perceive and pursue fitting existential responses.

¹¹¹ Frame, *Christian Life*, 235-36.

¹¹² Frame, *Christian Life*, 356.

¹¹³ Frame, *Christian Life*, 351.

¹¹⁴ So also Doriani: “Discernment is a cousin to wisdom. If wisdom is, among other things, skill in the arts of living, discernment is skill in the art of seeing” (Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 113).

¹¹⁵ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 255.

As with other skills and abilities, a reader's capacity to apply the Scriptures increases—discernment and wisdom accumulate—with use (Rom 12:2; Heb 5:14; cf. Eph 5:10), sometimes with the deliberate connection of chapter and verse with a specific situation, and at other times when biblically informed intuitions arise from previous exposure to Scripture and biblical truth.¹¹⁶ Progress in biblical (and doctrinal) understanding also advances one's capacity for wise application (Ps 119:99; Prov 1:2-6), and God sometimes uses fellow believers to bring discernment in a situation (e.g., Nathan's confrontation of David).¹¹⁷ In addition to these means, the Holy Spirit attends "consubstantially" to application: he is present "in, with, and under" the entire process.¹¹⁸ In the normative-existential plane of application, the Holy Spirit illumines, enabling readers to perceive the illocutionary leadership of the text while also "achieving the corresponding perlocutionary effect—belief, obedience, praise, and so on."¹¹⁹ These effects the Spirit achieves "not independently of the words and illocutions but precisely *by, with, and through* them."¹²⁰ The Spirit likewise enables the believer to interpret the situational "through the spectacles of Scripture."¹²¹ In application, God's Spirit works so as to empower the believer's discernment and wisdom to produce fruit in keeping with the Word he has inspired (Gal 5:22-23; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:21).

¹¹⁶ Frame, *Christian Life*, 358.

¹¹⁷ Frame, *Christian Life*, 358.

¹¹⁸ "Consubstantiation" is the belief that Christ's body and blood are present "in, with, and under" the respective communion elements in the Lord's Supper. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 994.

¹¹⁹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 428.

¹²⁰ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 199.

¹²¹ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 212-13.

USE the Gospel of Matthew in Counseling

Application is a three-dimensional effort in a particular situational context to submit the dynamic function and expression of one's heart to the authority of Scripture with discernment and wisdom. In the context of counseling, three-dimensional application of Matthew's Gospel involves three aspects (reflected in the acronym USE): understand the passage's implications for application, seek the passage's connections to counseling's framework, and explore how the passage applies to the counselee.

Before examining the strategy, three qualifications deserve delineation. First, the strategy's components are presented in a particular order. While there is a logic to that order, the arrangement is not intended to imply a rigid, step-by-step sequence since application is not always a one-way movement from text to present context.¹²² Second, the presentation is tailored to Matthew's Gospel. However, counselors may find the basic method adaptable to other literary genres, particularly historical narrative. Third, biblical counseling requires counselors to make a concerted, loving, wise effort to understand their counsees and their concerns. This contribution is essential for the strategy's third aspect—exploring how the passage applies to the counselee—but it is beyond the scope of the current study to address the process by which counselors gain such insight.¹²³

Understand the Passage's Implications for Application

Faithful application of Scripture in counseling requires textual understanding. A “thick” understanding of the text enables counselors to grasp the richness of the text's

¹²² Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82.

¹²³ Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 180-91; Tripp, *Instruments*, 115-97; Wayne A. Mack, “Taking Counselee Inventory: Collecting Data,” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 131-46; Randy Patten and Mark Dutton, “The Central Elements of the Biblical Counseling Process,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *CCBC*, 326-38; David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 129-40; David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 170. Similarly, other treatments of application also highlight the importance of exegeting both the text and the audience to which the text is applied. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 217; Naselli, *Understand and Apply*, 314-16.

normative leadership in both situational and existential directions.¹²⁴ Whether interacting with an isolated episode, a portion of Jesus’s teaching, or the whole Gospel, understanding leading to application comes through careful, contextual, and holistic reading and includes comprehension of what the passage communicates, an awareness of what Matthew has done in and through the passage (e.g., informing, warning, displaying the world in a particular way, etc.), and a developing recognition of how readers should submit to Matthew’s textual communication and activity.¹²⁵ A reader’s understanding of a passage thickens as the reader becomes increasingly aware of the richness of Matthew’s communication in that passage.

Chapell warns that explaining a text when preaching becomes a never-ending process unless the preacher has a purpose in his preaching.¹²⁶ A similar warning applies to reading that seeks a robust understanding of a text for use in counseling. Descriptions will rarely (if ever) be comprehensively thick; there will always remain another observation to make, another consequence or connection to uncover. Moreover, the criteria for a sufficiently thick description of a text proves elusive.¹²⁷ The perspicuity and richness of God’s Word frees counselors to strive to understand a text in its fullness according to their capacities, which will vary from counselor to counselor. On the side of

¹²⁴ Drawing on Gilbert Ryle’s concept of “thick descriptions” of human activity, Vanhoozer discusses interpretations as comparatively thick and thin based on the extent to which those interpretations engage with an author’s illocutions in a text. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 284-85; referencing Gilbert Ryle, “Thinking and Reflecting,” in *Collected Papers* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 2:465-79; Ryle, “The Thinking of Thoughts: What is ‘Le Penseur’ Doing?” in *Collected Papers*, 2:480-496. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 291-92, 302, 305, 331-32.

¹²⁵ See Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 27; Frame, *Knowledge of God*, 84; Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 120.

¹²⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 211-12.

¹²⁷ According to Vanhoozer, a reader’s description of a text “*is sufficiently thick when it allows us to appreciate everything the author is doing in a text*” (Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 284; cf. Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 179). However, this standard is unobtainable. Epistemic humility requires that readers remain open to the possibility that they may not have grasped everything an author has done in any particular text. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 90; cf. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning*, 462-65.

Scripture's perspicuity and thinner descriptions, the basic message of the Scriptures is clear and does not require sophisticated interpretive tools to read and uncover important and consequential understanding.¹²⁸ On the side of Scripture's richness and thicker descriptions, the Holy Spirit's inspiration and the human authors' personal wisdom produced an unfathomable book of books, one whose resources and benefits can never be exhausted by even the most devoted student of the text.

For counselors to discern when their understanding is sufficiently thick involves contextual considerations paired with discernment and humility. There is fruit to be found by readers who, as a matter of faithful stewardship, strive after the thickest descriptions allowed by their capacities and knowledge.¹²⁹ However, situational factors (e.g., diverse responsibilities, unexpected interruptions, etc.) necessarily and frequently affect how much time a counselor can devote to cultivating a thicker understanding of a passage. Thus evaluating the adequacy of a counselor's understanding requires both discernment and humility: discernment to see when an adequate understanding has been achieved or when to keep harvesting exegetical fruit, and humility to trust that ultimately God's grace through the transformational work of his Spirit (and not the thickness of the exegete's descriptions) produces genuine transformation. Counselors must keep as their goal in understanding Scripture not mastery of the text but to be mastered by the text; the goal of reading Scripture for counselor and counselee is discipleship.¹³⁰

A thick understanding of a passage that anticipates application looks for ways that passage provides normative guidance to application's situational and existential

¹²⁸ Barrett, *God's Word Alone*, 315-24; Frame, *Word of God*, 202-03.

¹²⁹ "Capacities and knowledge" are not static categories. As readers' understanding of a text grows, their knowledge grows and, thereby, increases their capacity for thicker understanding of both the part and the whole. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 139.

¹³⁰ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 66-68; Green, *Seized by Truth*, 11-12, 42-62; Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 136-39; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 401-07; Vanhoozer, "Reader in New Testament Interpretation," 282-283.

dimensions. Both episodes and Jesus's teaching supply normative guidance, but they do so in ways unique to their form. In the situational direction, characters experience a variety of hardships throughout the Gospel, and of particular importance is how Matthew presents Jesus in relation to those circumstances. Theological truth about Jesus and his relationship to God, the kingdom, and the rest of creation is revealed through Jesus's actions and words as well as the responses of other characters to Jesus. Throughout his teaching, Jesus addresses various circumstantial issues and reveals theological truth about God, himself, the kingdom, humanity, and the rest of creation. In the existential direction, the responses of characters, insight into the operations of their hearts, and signals about their values and priorities provide examples for readers to consider, follow, or reject. Jesus's teaching also addresses an array of external and internalized responses, as well as dynamic heart functions his followers are to cultivate or expunge.

Identifying Scripture's leadership through interpretation and application frequently involves asking questions of a text and answering those questions based on information available in the text.¹³¹ A set of sample questions is provided in the first section of appendix 1 to assist counselors in their initial attempts to sketch out how a text intersects with application's existential and situational dimensions. While separated according to dimension of application, the questions are further subdivided by type of passage under consideration—episodes and Jesus's teaching—to account for variations in how different communicative forms lead readers toward application.¹³² Additional questions prompt counselors to consider their passage's treatment of these concerns in relation to their treatment elsewhere in the Gospel—no small part of contextually reading and understanding the text.

¹³¹ In addition to the discussion above, see also Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 101-04.

¹³² The "whole Gospel" questions could be easily adapted to smaller sections of the Gospel in an effort to identify relevant threads and themes in smaller units of the Gospel.

Seek the Passage's Connections to Counseling's Framework

Having begun to identify the passage's treatment of situational and existential concerns, a counselor next seeks ways the passage intersects with counseling's framework (see chapter 2) by considering how those concerns correspond to the elements of that framework. For no less than four reasons, this uniting is not an attempt to force Matthew's text to conform to a grid foreign to the biblical text but is rather an exploration of ways the text's communication aligns with counseling's grid. First, by seeking to understand and follow a text on its own terms, this method takes its signals from the text as the divine author and the inspired evangelist communicate to readers through it. Second, the root-fruit analogy central to counseling's framework (see below) factors specifically into Matthew's presentation that "both works and words reveal the true nature of the person" (12:33-37; cf. 3:8-10; 7:16-20; 21:43).¹³³ Thus, the approach is consistent with Matthew's treatment of humanity and what people's verbal and active responses expose about their internal condition. Third, counseling's framework derives from a canonically-informed anthropology and a biblical understanding of the complex relationship between God, humanity, and the rest of creation.¹³⁴ Thus, connecting counseling's framework and application's dimensions in a passage amounts to discerning how that passage normatively addresses the theological considerations of counseling's framework. Fourth, the network of a reader's beliefs, values, and commitments admittedly exercises a (subtle or overt) shaping influence anytime a reader interprets and applies a text.¹³⁵ The legitimacy of the resulting application depends on that network's

¹³³ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 351.

¹³⁴ See especially, Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 81-85; Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 9-176; cf. Adams, *Theology*, 94-173; Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 184-213.

¹³⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 466; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 382, 392. See also Barrett, *God's Word Alone*, 146; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 226-43; Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 18; Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds*, 66-68.

biblical faithfulness and the reader's textual understanding. The union of counseling's framework with the text's treatment of application's dimensions amounts to an effort to allow biblical convictions to inform the process of application in counseling.

Uniting counseling's framework—especially as structured and presented by Lane and Tripp in *How People Change*—with observations from application's dimensions is virtually seamless.¹³⁶ In the situational direction, Lane's and Tripp's four-element structure metaphorically captures the situation of every person's life, particularly when life as represented by those elements is considered within the providential purview of a sovereign, wise, and good God.¹³⁷ Looking at the framework's individual components, "heat" refers to "the person's situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings, and temptations" (i.e., predominately their suffering, though not exclusively).¹³⁸ Types of suffering include "general life hardships (e.g., bereavement, natural disasters, economic downturns); being sinned against by others (e.g., rejection, abuse, assault, gossip); bodily problems (chronic or acute; minor or severe; including brain injuries/disorders); demonic attacks; [or] ungodly counsel, false teaching, and worldly cultural influences."¹³⁹ In broad terms, the setting and circumstances of an episode places each character, including and especially Jesus, in the heat of life. Specifically, an episode's heat refers to any aspect of a character's situation to which that

¹³⁶ In addition to *How People Change*, my understanding and comprehension of counseling's framework also draws heavily from Robert Jones's presentation of this framework. Robert Jones, "Introduction to Biblical Counseling" (lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, July 2017); Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H Academic, forthcoming), chap. 10.

¹³⁷ Jones explicitly adds the "sovereign, wise, and good God" element to Lane and Tripp's framework. Jones, "Introduction;" referencing Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988). See also Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 96-104; Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 104-23. So also Adams writes, "God is man's Environment [*sic*]" (Adams, *Theology*, 39).

¹³⁸ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

¹³⁹ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *Gospel for Disordered Lives*, chap. 10. See Lambert, *Theology*, 248-53 for another approach to categories of suffering.

character responds or which influences the character's response. Counselors can use the categories of suffering above along with common grace blessings to identify heat elements in an episode. Jesus's teaching across the Gospel also addresses life's heat anytime Jesus's teaching—regardless of form (i.e., direct instruction, parable, etc.)—deals with life's difficulties, blessings, and temptations.

The third main element of counseling's framework—"cross"—is also oriented in application's situational dimension and points specifically to the biblically-revealed situation of "the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change" (i.e., Christ and his gospel).¹⁴⁰ Here, the text and framework coincide where the passage conveys truth about God's redemptive presence and work, especially in Christ. In episodes throughout the Gospel, Jesus—in his presence, action, and instruction—is the primary "cross" component for secondary characters. These accounts present Jesus as God's provision through Jesus's healing and other miraculous activity, as well as other characters' response to Jesus—especially their pursuit of help and wholeness from him and what they say about him (e.g., titular references).¹⁴¹ In Jesus's teaching, "cross" contributions appear any time Jesus's teaching touches upon "the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love." At this stage of study, counselors should not confine their observations to explicit references to God's salvific and transformative work in Christ (e.g., Matt 1:21; 26:27-28) but any way the text speaks to the character and activity of the sovereign, wise, and good God (Matt 5:45; 15:13), since "people desperately need to be taught about the nature of God. They desperately need a biblical, God-centered perspective on everything."¹⁴² Every way

¹⁴⁰ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

¹⁴¹ Again, the situational (e.g., facts about Jesus as God's provision) and existential (e.g., Jesus's responses to others, and the responses of others to Jesus) dimensions are closely entwined.

¹⁴² John Piper, "God's Glory is the Goal of Biblical Counseling," *JBC* 20, no. 2 (2002): 9.

the passage reveals God, his character, and his work has the potential to be life-giving and life-sustaining and should be regarded at this stage as a potential provision of God for the counselee's growth and good (Jer 9:23-24; John 17:3).

The “thorns” and “fruit” elements also inform counseling's framework situationally anytime a passage—particularly in Jesus's teaching—offers facts about the human heart, its responses (internal or expressed), and the relationship between a person's situation (i.e., “heat” and “cross”) and responses (e.g., Matt 12:33-37; cf. 3:10; 7:15-20). However, Matthew's Gospel primarily addresses “thorns” and “fruit” in the existential dimension, as they refer to a person's sinful and God-honoring, respectively, complex and dynamic responses to their circumstances. These responses further subdivide into two constituent elements: “roots” and “fruits.”¹⁴³ “Roots” correspond to Pierre's dynamic heart functions (cognition, affection, and volition) and a person's fundamental experience of these functions through (often indistinguishable) beliefs, desires (or values), and commitments (or priorities).¹⁴⁴ “Fruits” refer to the expression of these functions—whether internalized or expressed—in the form of thoughts or interpretations, feelings or emotions, and choices (words and actions).¹⁴⁵ In episodes, “fruits” (as expressed responses) appear in character's actions, words (direct or indirect quotation), and emotions. Both Jesus and select secondary characters provide examples of God-honoring responses (Lane's and Tripp's “fruit”), while various characters throughout the Gospel manifest sinful responses (Lane's and Tripp's “thorns”). Matthew highlights character's “roots” through “telling” and “showing” narration, as well as

¹⁴³ Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83-85, 92-93, 102.

¹⁴⁴ See Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 31, 38-47. See also Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 47-48, cf. 50-52. Rather than three functions, Jones identifies “two primary functions—our beliefs and motives” (Jones, *Uprooting Anger*, 48).

¹⁴⁵ See Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 31, 38-47. See also Jones's treatments of concealed and revealed anger for examples of internalized and expressed responses. Jones, *Uprooting Anger*, 77-111.

through Jesus’s discerning statements about the hearts and responses of others.¹⁴⁶ The subjects of “roots” and “fruits” also feature in Jesus’s teaching as he confronts the presence of sin and leads his followers in the way of true righteousness. Whether by direct description, inference, or example, a passage speaks to the roots and fruit of “thorns” and “fruit” anytime it touches on sinful or God-honoring human responses.

In *CrossTalk*, Michael Emlet also fuses counseling’s biblical themes and textual observations, advocating an approach that considers counselees through three lenses—as a sufferer, a sinner, and a saint—and ponders Scripture’s communication to counselees in these “roles.”¹⁴⁷ In many ways, these three categories map onto the framework used here: Emlet’s “sufferer” overlaps with Lane’s and Tripp’s “heat,” “sinner” with “thorns,” and “saint” with both “cross” and “fruit.” A strength of Emlet’s approach is its sustained emphasis on Scripture as personal communication to be applied and not merely a source to be read in abstraction. However, Emlet’s structure focuses particularly on application’s existential dimension by using the counselee’s three-fold experience as its organizing principle. As a consequence, Emlet’s method inherently bends inward towards the counselee. While inward reflection is warranted and necessary, counselees—as those seeking help for personal concerns—often need help in reorienting their attention away from themselves and toward God as their Creator and Sustainer.¹⁴⁸ The present perspectival approach—with a structure that unites both inward (existential) and outward (situational) attention—incorporates the needed focus on personal

¹⁴⁶ See Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 37.

¹⁴⁷ Emlet, *CrossTalk*, 74; cf. 74-79.

¹⁴⁸ Douglas Bookman, “The Godward Focus of Biblical Counseling” in MacArthur and Mack, *CHCB*, 51-63; David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair,” *JBC* 37, no. 3 (2013), 39; Stuart Scott, “‘Jackie’ and Dissociative Identity Disorder,” in *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture*, ed. by Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2015), 221.

experience while also anticipating and encouraging attentiveness to the larger situation of God's presence and provision in the midst of the counselee's (often difficult) situation. A three-dimensional approach to application paired with counseling's framework guides counselors to look for ways Scripture gives normative leadership to both directions of attention necessary for faithful counseling.

Bringing counseling's framework into contact with a particular Matthean passage also requires argument-making. Rarely will a passage evidence connections with each component of the framework. Whether connections are identified intuitively or with effort, arriving at a passage's guidance for counseling requires counselors to ask and answer questions in light of their thick understanding of the text, including their initial situational and existential observations. The second part of appendix 1 provides sample questions that counselors can use with a passage in the Gospel of Matthew to aid them in discerning how that passage normatively informs the concerns of counseling's framework. Similar to the arrangement of the prior step's questions, the "Seek" questions are first grouped according to the divisions of counseling's framework and then according to the primary communicative elements of the Gospel.

Explore How the Passage Applies to the Counselee

Applying a text in counseling finally requires the counselor to explore how the focal passage normatively addresses the specific circumstances and responses of the counselee. In this third stage, counselors consider observations about a counselee's situation together with Scripture's guidance established in the first two steps. The circumstances in an episode might compare with some aspect of the counselee's circumstances by either direct correlation or analogy. Jesus's teaching may address specifically or share some correspondence with aspects of the counselee's situation. Through characters in episodes and Jesus's instruction, a passage might address the

counselee’s exhibited sinful words, actions, and expressed emotions (i.e., expressed sinful fruit); the counselee’s experienced sinful thoughts, feelings and internalized emotions, as well as choices (i.e., internal sinful fruit); or the counselee’s sinful beliefs, desires, and commitments (i.e., sinful roots) underneath these errant responses. In various elements—Jesus’s words and actions in his interactions with other characters, other characters’ expressed or internalized responses to Jesus, and Jesus’s teaching—passages often address one or more of God’s many and gracious provisions for change, especially Jesus as God’s provision. Again through both characters and Jesus’s instruction, a passage will frequently lead counselees toward righteous roots resulting in righteous fruit (internal or expressed) or affirm a counselee’s already-present God-honoring roots and fruit. An episode’s details or Jesus’s instruction can address relationships between the framework’s elements in ways that help both counselor and counselee better understand the counselee’s experience and guide towards lasting change. Additionally, a character’s immediate responses—internalized or expressed, sinful or righteous—can challenge readers to contemplate their deeply held beliefs, desires, and commitments that either contradict or correspond to the convictions suggested by the character’s responses.

As with application generally, demonstrating Scripture’s normative leadership in the specifics of a counselee’s life may or may not progress intuitively but always involves asking and answering strategic questions of both the counselee and the text.¹⁴⁹ As with the first two steps of the proposed strategy, the third section of appendix 1 provides questions tailored to counselors’ application of Matthew’s Gospel to the details of counselees’ lives. As counselors work through the connections and implications of their chosen passage for their counselees, counselors should anticipate that a single passage will rarely touch on all elements of counseling’s framework, nor will a single

¹⁴⁹ “Exegete the Bible; Exegete the Person: An Interview with John Street,” interview by David Powlison, *JBC* 16, no. 2 (2002): 10.

passage provide all of Scripture's guidance necessary for a counselor to address a counselee's concerns adequately. The canon—not a single passage, nor even the Gospel of Matthew itself—sufficiently provides all the divine words needed to equip the counselor and for the counselee's pursuit of godliness. Therefore, counselors must exercise discernment and wisdom to bring relevant guidance from other parts of Scripture—either elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel or across the canon—alongside the insights gleaned from the focal text in order to guide their counsees to submit to God in their personal circumstances.

Conclusion

Application of Scripture is a necessary argument that pursues present-day submission to Scripture's leadership in the circumstances and experiences of life. Meshing three-dimensional application with counseling's framework leads to a three-stage process by which counselors can strategically and consistently use Matthew's Gospel and its rich diversity to address counsees' concerns.¹⁵⁰ By using this strategy with a Matthean pericope, the next chapter demonstrates the value of this approach for biblical counseling.

¹⁵⁰ In this chapter, application has been considered with two specific concerns: the Gospel of Matthew as the focal text and counseling as focal context. However, the basics of the three dimensional approach to application may also prove useful not only for the other three Gospels but also for other literary genres and other contexts of word ministry (e.g., preaching and teaching). Furthermore, the combination of this approach to application with counseling's framework may also likewise yield positive fruit for how the other Gospels and different biblical genres uniquely contribute to the theory and practice of biblical counseling. Furthermore, the union of biblical counseling with a three-dimensional approach to application may also prove useful, particularly in faithfully advocating for the sufficiency of Scripture for biblical counseling and especially with regards to the relationship between Scripture's revelation and other forms of knowledge (e.g., the situational and existential observations of secular psychology).

CHAPTER 5

APPLYING MATTHEW 14:22-33 IN COUNSELING

In Matthew 14:22-33, Matthew records two instances of fear, Jesus's water-walking miracle, Jesus's rescue of Peter from sinking into the sea, a calming of the sea, and the disciples' worshipful identification of Jesus as the Son of God. In both its basic elements and its nuances, this story is well-suited to inform the counselor and for use in counseling. This chapter examines this pericope utilizing the three-fold strategy presented in the previous chapter. After presenting a thick understanding of the passage and seeking ways the account connects with counseling's framework, the final section explores how this passage helps counselors dissect and respond to their counselees' experiences of fear and summarizes two specific instances in which this account has guided my pastoral care.

Understanding Matthew 14:22-33

A thick, application-anticipating understanding of this Matthean pericope pursues comprehending how the passage's interwoven literary, historical, and theological elements normatively address situational realities (i.e., historical and theological facts) and existential features (i.e., a person's experience of their situation).¹ For this episode, these elements are helpfully examined in individual scenes: Jesus on the mountain and the disciples in the boat (22-24), Jesus on the water and the disciples in the boat (25-27), Jesus and Peter on the water (28-31), Jesus and the disciples in the boat (32-33).²

¹ As discussed in chapter 4, the normative, situational, and existential aspects are not independent. For example, a single situational detail may refer to the separate experience of multiple characters, and the Scriptures speak normatively about both. For example, in the current passage, Jesus sends the disciples and crowds away (14:22): an event Jesus experiences as the act of dismissing these groups and being obeyed, whereas both the disciples and crowds experience this event as being dismissed by Jesus.

² Commentators generally agree on the subsections in the center of the account, but they

Understanding 14:22-24

The pericope begins as an abrupt (εὐθέως) conclusion to the miraculous feeding of the five-thousand (14:22; cf. 14:13-21).³ Jesus sends his disciples ahead by boat, the text anticipating a reunion without hinting how.⁴ The text suggests Jesus directs the disciples with a strong urging, a compulsion.⁵ While Jesus acts decisively to send the disciples away, Matthew leaves Jesus's motivation unexplained, unlike John 6:15.⁶ The story suggests both groups are compliant recipients, and the remainder of the story focuses exclusively on Jesus and his followers.

Jesus then departs to pray, but Matthew says nothing about the content of Jesus's solitary prayer (14:23).⁷ Commentators have filled this void with numerous proposals.⁸ Though the content of Jesus's prayer remains veiled, textual features link Jesus's mountain prayer to other aspects of the Gospel. With repeated emphasis—κατ' ἰδίαν (“by himself”) and μόνος ἦν ἐκεῖ (“he was alone there”)—Matthew stresses Jesus's isolation, this instance being “the only place after the initial period in the wilderness (4:1-

subdivide the periphery of the story in different ways. For the division here, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 234-36, Logos Bible Software; and Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 406, Logos Bible Software.

³ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982) 296; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 318, Logos Bible Software; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), chap. 64, “14:22,” para. 1, Kindle.

⁴ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 598; cf. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of EBC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), sec. 5.A.4, “22,” para. 2-4, Kindle; Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, Broadman & Holman Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017), 165.

⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “22,” para. 1; Nolland, *Matthew*, 598; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:22,” para. 1; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 568; Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 290, Logos Bible Software.

⁶ France, *Matthew*, 568; cf. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993), 422, Logos Bible Software.

⁷ France, *Matthew*, 569.

⁸ See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 381; Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 168, Kindle.

11) where Matthew specifically mentions that Jesus chose to be truly alone.”⁹ The recurrence of *κατ’ ἰδίαν* (14:13, 23) from the prior pericope suggests that Jesus has resumed his effort at solitude previously subverted by eager crowds (14:13-14).¹⁰ That initial attempt was prompted by hearing of Herod’s interpretation of Jesus and his fame (14:1-2, 12).¹¹ Commentators—though divided about the Gospel’s overall structure (see chapter 3)—concur that this portion of the Gospel is particularly attentive to polarized (especially negative) responses to Jesus.¹² Herod’s reported reaction to Jesus—the apparent motivation for Jesus’s withdrawal—contributes to this focus.¹³

Additionally, Jesus’s isolated prayer links to his eventual suffering and death. Looking backward, suffering and death enter the current passage’s panoramic vision with the account of John’s execution as part of Matthew’s explanation of Herod’s response to Jesus (14:1-12). In recounting John’s murder, Matthew foreshadows Jesus’s future arrest and crucifixion.¹⁴ Later in the Gospel, Jesus only elsewhere prays privately in Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion (26:36-46).¹⁵ Donald Hagner suspects, based on the aforementioned links, that Jesus’s thoughts on the mountain are directed

⁹ France, *Matthew*, 568-69; cf. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 422; Morris, *Matthew*, 381; Nolland, *Matthew*, 598.

¹⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 372; cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 297; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 422; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 515, Kindle.

¹¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 231; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.3, “13-14,” para. 1; Morris, *Matthew*, 376; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 63, “14:13,” para. 1. Others see the first withdrawal as prompted by news of John’s execution. France, *Matthew*, 560; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 417; Nolland, *Matthew*, 588; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 485, Logos Bible Software.

¹² Compare Blomberg, *Matthew*, 24-25; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5, “Overview,” para. 2; France, *Matthew*, 547; Turner, *Matthew*, 358.

¹³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:464; Turner, *Matthew*, 362.

¹⁴ See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:475-76.

¹⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234; Nolland, *Matthew*, 599; Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 140n54.

toward his future suffering and death.¹⁶ The contents of Jesus’s prayer remain a mystery, but John Nolland postulates a connection with “the christological focus of the material from 13:54 to 16:20 [that] prepares for the beginning of the Passion predictions at 16:21.”¹⁷ Furthermore, for Matthew, Jesus on the mountain may also point to Jesus as the redeemer greater than Moses (cf. 5:1-2; 17:1-8), particularly given the prior miraculous provision of food (14:13-21) and the mastery over the sea Jesus will exhibit before morning dawns.¹⁸ As Jesus prays on the mountain, Matthew prepares his readers for the Savior’s future suffering by which “he will save his people from their sins” (1:21b).

In the pericope’s storyline, Jesus’s seclusion functions “to explain how Jesus comes to be so far away from his disciples on this occasion when they find themselves in difficulties.”¹⁹ Verse 24 turns to the separation from the disciples’ side by looking to the boat “many stadia” (σταδίους πολλούς) from the shore.²⁰ Moreover, from the wind and the waves, the far-away boat (and its passengers) were being harassed (βασανιζόμενον), a strong word Matthew previously used for the suffering of the Centurion’s paralyzed servant (8:6) and Jesus’s future wrath against the demons (8:29).²¹ This event is not the first harrowing nighttime sea experience for these disciples—the waves (ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων; 14:24; cf. 8:24) and wind (ἄνεμος; 14:24, 30, 32; cf. 8:26-27) being among the many verbal parallels with that earlier event (8:23-27).²² In the earlier event, Matthew emphasized the threat posed by the σεισμὸς μέγας (literally “a great earthquake”), a

¹⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 422.

¹⁷ Nolland, *Matthew*, 599.

¹⁸ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 139-40; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:502.

¹⁹ France, *Matthew*, 569. See also Gundry, *Matthew*, 297.

²⁰ John reports the length the disciples have traveled: twenty-five or thirty stadia (John 6:19). Matthew’s distance report is less specific. Turner, *Matthew*, 372.

²¹ Morris, *Matthew*, 381; William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 599-600; cf. Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 318.

²² For a discussion of parallels, see Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 16n2.

tumult of wind and sea producing waves that swamped the boat (8:24, 26).²³ In the water-walking event, however, the harassing weather appears not as a life-threatening occasion but an impediment to their progress, but nevertheless a scenario ripe for divine rescue.²⁴ Unlike that prior experience, Jesus is neither asleep nor with them (8:24); this time the disciples are in the boat on the sea in the storm alone.²⁵

In the situational direction, this section of the story connects with the events of the preceding miracle, considers briefly Jesus praying alone, and observes the circumstances of the disciples separated from Jesus and in the boat during the nighttime storm. Theologically, the situational dimension draws on the milieu of polarizing responses during Jesus's ministry, while also anticipating Jesus's redemptive suffering and role as the greater Moses. Existentially, the crowds, disciples, and Jesus all feature at different levels, with the groups together as the story opens but separated at this section's conclusion. Table 1 below summarizes the situational and existential elements of 14:22-24 (and relevant contributions from the preceding context) examined in the preceding discussion. As noted earlier, the situational and existential dimensions cannot be entirely detached, and this overlap becomes apparent when the dimensions are set side-by-side. However, considering scenes through these lenses aids recognition of the respective details of the episode's concerns to prepare for the application reflections below.

²³ Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 31, "8:24," para. 1; Turner, *Matthew*, 244; cf. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 350-51.

²⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:503.

²⁵ France, *Matthew*, 569; Green, *Matthew*, 168; cf. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516.

Table 1. Summary of situational and existential elements in Matthew 14:22-24

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Situational Elements</i>	<i>Existential Elements</i>
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus hears the report about Herod and attempts to withdraw but crowds follow (14:13). • Miraculous healing and feeding of five thousand (14:14-21) • Jesus's redemptive suffering and identity as the greater Moses echo in the background. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus attempts to withdraw, saw crowds, had compassion, healed sick, and provided food (14:13-21). • Disciples witnessed events and participated in distribution of food (14:15-19). • Crowds followed Jesus, as well as saw and experienced healing and nourishment (14:13-21).
14:22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus immediately sends the disciples away in the boat across the sea and dismisses the crowd. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus identifies a need to separate disciples and crowds (reason unexplained by Matthew). He authoritatively sends disciples ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and he dismisses the crowds. • The disciples obediently get into the boat without Jesus and go towards the other side of the sea. They likely did not know when or where Jesus would rejoin them. • The crowds are dismissed by Jesus.
14:23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus goes on the mountain to pray by himself. This prayer has contextual connections to the polarizing responses to Jesus (e.g., Herod) and Jesus's future suffering. • Evening sets in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus resumes his previous attempt at solitude (see 14:13) and goes up to the mountain to pray for an extended period of time. The focus of his prayer is unknown. He was alone when evening came.
14:24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the night, the boat is far from land, and being beaten by the winds and the waves. • Jesus is not present in the boat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From within the boat and without Jesus, the disciples are experiencing the nighttime storm's wind and waves.

Understanding 14:25-27

The next development occurs between 3:00 AM and 6:00 AM, suggesting “the disciples have been rowing for their lives for several hours and are about at the end of their strength and resolve.”²⁶ With astonishing simplicity, Matthew states Jesus walks on the sea to the disciples (14:25).²⁷ This statement achieves at least two effects. First, Matthew gives his readers a privileged position. The disciples do not yet know of Jesus’s coming, thus Matthew allows readers to see what the disciples cannot, providing an opportunity to examine the disciples’ experience of this intense situation.²⁸ Second, Matthew presents Jesus as the divine rescuer. Just as God walks on water in the OT, so also Jesus strides the Galilean sea: “Yahweh the omnipotent creator treads upon the waters. . . . By *walking* on the sea Jesus overcomes the powers of chaos and subdues them” (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16; 51:9-10; cf. Gen 1:2; Hab 3:15).²⁹ Ulrich Luz suggests the predawn timing reinforces Jesus as the divine helper, since this period was “the biblical time of God’s helpful intervention” (Exod 14:24; Ps 46:5; Isa 17:14).³⁰

Seeing Jesus but not identifying him, the disciples were terrified (*ἐταράχθησαν*; 14:26).³¹ Their fear led to two oral responses (14:26): they said (*λέγοντες*) “It’s a ghost!” and they cried out (*ἔκραξαν*). The first response helps readers associate the disciples’ fear with their (mis)interpretation.³² Acknowledgment of their fear-rooted-cry further

²⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:25,” para. 1; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:503-04; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Keener, *Matthew*, 406-07.

²⁷ France, *Matthew*, 569.

²⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 31-32. See also J. de Wall Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 116-17, 125-26; Timothy Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 64.

²⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:504; cf. France, *Matthew*, 566; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Nolland, *Matthew*, 600; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:25,” para. 1; Turner, *Matthew*, 372.

³⁰ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 319. See also Nolland, *Matthew*, 600; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:25,” para. 1.

³¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234-35; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “25-27,” para. 1; Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, BTCB (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 251.

³² In the word *φάντασμα*, most commentators see a generic reference to a “ghost” or “a specter

heightens the reader’s awareness of the intensity of the disciples’ panic.³³ From the reader’s privileged perspective, the disciples’ interpretive error “places the emphasis on Jesus’s identity.”³⁴ Accordingly, Jesus wastes no time in responding to the disciples’ exclamations of terror: immediately (εὐθὺς) he answers their desperate cries (14:27).³⁵ Jesus answers with three short declarations, each one significant and together a complete response to the disciples’ anxieties. First, Jesus positively exhorts them to “take heart” or “have courage” (θαρσεῖτε), encouragement he also spoke as his first word to both a paralytic (9:2) and a bleeding woman (9:22).³⁶ In those instances, “Jesus has called on people in need to take heart, and gone on to deal with their needs. We can expect the same here.”³⁷ By crossing the sea and coming to his storm-tossed followers, Jesus has guaranteed that his disciples will complete the journey on which he initially sent them (22, 34; cf. Ps 77:19-20).³⁸ Walter Grundmann’s comments on θαρσέω in John 16:33 likewise suit the present scene: “[The disciples] are in the hands of the Victor over the cosmos. Hence they need have no fear what the cosmos will bring.”³⁹

Second, Jesus’s self-identification—ἐγώ εἰμι (“It is I;” 14:27)—gives “the

or apparition from the realm of the dead” (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234). Some allow for the possibility of a “sea demon” (Witherington, *Matthew*, 291; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:505).

³³ See Morris, *Matthew*, 382n59; Nolland, *Matthew*, 600; Witherington, *Matthew*, 291.

³⁴ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 141.

³⁵ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Nolland, *Matthew*, 601; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516.

³⁶ This verb occurs seven times in the NT (Matt 9:2; 9:22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11). All of them are spoken by Jesus except Mark 10:49 where others encourage Bartimaeus after Jesus had called for him. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:506; cf. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 418. In the earlier Matthean instances, Jesus not only encouraged courage, but he also recognized the faith of those involved (9:2, 22). Though not explicitly stated in this sea account, perhaps Jesus’s encouragement to the disciples carries with it an implicit awareness on his part of some trust the disciples possess, even a trust drawn out by the self-revelation that immediately follows (see 14:28-29).

³⁷ Nolland, *Matthew*, 601.

³⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:504.

³⁹ Walter Grundmann, “θαρσέω (θαρσέω),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:26, Logos Bible Software.

central reason for these calming exhortations.”⁴⁰ The significance of these words far outpaces their simplicity. In the historical moment, Jesus could have naturally and simply used the expression to identify himself to the disciples.⁴¹ However, other intimations of Jesus’s divinity in the text suggest Matthew here invites his post-resurrection readers to hear echoes of the OT “I am” declarations (Exod 3:14; Isa 43:10-13; 51:12; cf. John 6:35; 8:12; etc.).⁴²

Third, Jesus issues the concluding bracket to his fear-dispelling words with a negative command: *μὴ φοβεῖσθε* (“Do not be afraid,” 14:27).⁴³ This appeal, or some form of it, occurs nine times in Matthew’s Gospel issued either by Jesus (10:26, 28x2, 31; 14:27; 17:7; 28:10) or an angel of the Lord (1:20; 28:5). The phrase “is a note of reassurance that runs right through this Gospel. . . . Matthew likes to make the point that Jesus’s own need never fear.”⁴⁴ This pattern aligns with the appearance of these words of comfort across the canon (e.g., Matt 17:7; 28:5, 10; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; Rev 1:17).⁴⁵ The phrase’s pairing with the preceding *ἐγὼ εἰμι* recalls the coupling of God’s self-revelation and comfort spoken to the patriarchs and Israel (Gen 15:1; 26:14; 28:13; 46:3; Isa 41:4, 10-14; 43:1-13).⁴⁶ God’s OT call—rooted in his revelation and promises—to cast aside fear and foster courage finds fulfillment in the courage and comfort Jesus’s person and presence provides.

⁴⁰ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “25-27,” para. 1.

⁴¹ France, *Matthew*, 569n14; Nolland, *Matthew*, 601.

⁴² Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “25-27,” para. 1; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423. See also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:506; Gundry, *Matthew*, 299; Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 251; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:27,” para. 2; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516; Witherington, *Matthew*, 291.

⁴³ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “25-27,” para. 1.

⁴⁴ Morris, *Matthew*, 382.

⁴⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:506; cf. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 601; Turner, *Matthew*, 372. See also Judges 6:23, Daniel 10:12, 19. Nolland, *Matthew*, 601n103.

⁴⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:506; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516; Witherington, *Matthew*, 291.

Observing Matthew’s characterization of the disciples’ experience together with Jesus’s response, both have a three-fold structure with every element of the disciples’ experience addressed by Jesus’s reply.⁴⁷ To the disciples terror (*ἐταράχθησαν*) Jesus responds, “Take courage” (*θαρσεῖτε*). Though the disciples say “It is a ghost” (*φάντασμα ἔστιν*), Jesus declares “It is I” (*ἐγώ εἰμι*).⁴⁸ When the disciples cry from fear (*ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου ἔκραξαν*), Jesus commands, “Do not be afraid” (*μὴ φοβεῖσθε*). Jesus is the sufficient solution to the disciples’ anxieties.

Considering the situational elements in this portion of the story, the stormy weather first mentioned in verse 24 continues (and will do so until verse 32), and the evening of the preceding section becomes the pre-dawn period of early morning. Jesus walks on the water towards the disciples, they mistake him, and he responds to their outburst. Theologically, each stage of the story in this section reinforces—either directly or indirectly—the truth about Jesus’s divine nature and his identity as the answer to the disciples’ fears. Existentially, Jesus’s experiences include walking on the water (though Matthew provides no existential details), awareness of the disciples’ response, and replying to each aspect of the disciples’ fright. From the disciples’ vantage point, they continue to experience the effects of the storm, see something on the water and respond in terror, and are responded to by Jesus. A summary of the situational and existential elements of 14:25-27 is provided in table 2 below.

⁴⁷ Perhaps Matthew here again demonstrates his preference for triads though they feature more prominently through Matthew 12. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 72, Logos Bible Software.

⁴⁸ Luz poignantly observes that in his reply “Jesus ‘dedemonizes’ the ghost” (Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320). See also Morris, *Matthew*, 382; Nolland, *Matthew*, 601; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:27,” para. 2.

Table 2. Summary of situational and existential elements in Matthew 14:25-27

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Situational Elements</i>	<i>Existential Elements</i>
14:25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fourth watch of the night (3:00 AM to 6:00 AM) • Jesus walked on water to the disciples, an act which highlights Jesus’s divinity. • The stormy weather continues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus walks on the water out to the disciples in the midst of wind and waves.
14:26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disciples see Jesus and respond. • For the reader, the disciples’ confused response indirectly highlights Jesus’s divinity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus continues walking on the water to the disciples. Jesus knows the disciples’ response (see 14:27). • The disciples see something walking on the water, are terrified, say “It is a ghost!” and cry out in fear.
14:27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus immediately responds to the disciples, and the content highlights Jesus’s divinity and his identity as the answer to the disciples’ fears. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus responds immediately to the disciples with, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” • The disciples are apparently aware of Jesus’s response (see 14:28).

Understanding 14:28-31

The narrative’s viewport quickly narrows to Jesus and Peter. Both Mark and John include a version of the larger event (Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21), but only Matthew retells this Petrine experience. This occasion of narrowed and particular attention on Peter is the first of multiple such instances across Matthew’s Gospel.⁴⁹ This “little story within a story” opens with Peter responding to his Master’s self-revelation.⁵⁰ Each piece of Peter’s response manifests confidence in the person, presence, and power of Jesus. First, Peter addresses Jesus as “Lord” (κύριε; 14:28), a title Peter uses again as

⁴⁹ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “28,” para. 1; France, *Matthew*, 568; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Morris, *Matthew*, 382-83.

⁵⁰ J. P. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15b-21*, *Analecta Biblica* 87 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 60.

he pleads for rescue (14:30). The word does appear in Matthew as a “form of respectful address in contexts where no idea of divine majesty is present (13:27; 21:30; 25:20, 22, 24; 27:63).”⁵¹ However, when applied to Jesus, it carries more freight: “It is addressed to Jesus as the one who is expected to save the suppliant from illness or danger . . . with the assumption that he possessed more than ordinary power. . . . The contexts in which it is used with reference to Jesus indicate that it conveys for Matthew a unique degree of authority.”⁵² W. D. Davies and Dale Allison suggest the title’s use in both sea miracle narratives (8:25; 14:28-30), as well as in requests for healing (e.g., 8:2, 6; 15:22) links the label “with Jesus’ majestic ἐξουσία [authority].”⁵³ On the water, Peter may not have intended the title to signal a fully formed Christian confession, but its use in an astounding request in the midst of an intense scene suggests more than deferential respect.⁵⁴

The remainder of Peter’s words—expressed as a conditional request—further locate his confidence in Jesus. The protasis of the condition—εἰ σὺ εἶ (“if it is you”)—complements Jesus’s prior ἐγὼ εἶμι.⁵⁵ As a first class conditional statement, Peter’s statement assumes the protasis (in this case, “it is you”) to be true for the sake of the argument being made.⁵⁶ An imperative in the apodosis (in this case, “command me . . .”) of a first class conditional does not require more than such an assumption (e.g., Matt 5:29, 30; 18:8, 9; 27:40, 43). At a minimum, Peter assumes the figure is Jesus and then issues a request that provides firmer textual footing for seeing Peter’s confidence in

⁵¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 287-88.

⁵² France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 288.

⁵³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:20. See also Morris, *Matthew*, 383.

⁵⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; cf. 2:20. See also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235.

⁵⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; Nolland, *Matthew*, 601.

⁵⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 690, Logos Bible Software.

Christ.⁵⁷ Jesus would be able to command and enable Peter to come onto the water, and Peter will only venture onto the water if Jesus beckons him.⁵⁸ Matthew offers no hints about what motivates Peter's request, which is "apparently irrelevant."⁵⁹ Regardless of motivation (and though he may be uncertain about the reliability of his own senses), he is certain about the reliability of Jesus; only confidence in Jesus would warrant such a request and the subsequent response.⁶⁰

With a single word, Jesus approves Peter's request and commands him to come (14:29a).⁶¹ Jesus's divine authority is thus demonstrated in his "ability to share his power and authority with others (cf. 10:1, 8; 11:27; 28:18)."⁶² What began for Peter as a request becomes a matter of trust and obedience.⁶³ Things begin well as Peter gets out of the boat and walks towards Jesus, following the pattern of his Lord (14:29b).⁶⁴ Thus, Peter's faith (reflected in his in-boat request) proves rightly placed in his pre-panic steps. However, the storm has not abated, and Peter's experience shifts when his attention is directed to "the wind" (or the wind's effects).⁶⁵ The result: he again experiences fear (ἐφοβήθη, 30; cf. 26-27).⁶⁶ Then, Peter begins to sink (καταποντίζεσθαι) and cries out (ἔκραξεν)—again

⁵⁷ See Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 690-94; cf. Matthew 12:27-28. Some scholars conclude the conditional particle should be translated "since." Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 601; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, "14:28," para. 2. Others are less adamant. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, "28," para. 2; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; Morris, *Matthew*, 383; Turner, *Matthew*, 373.

⁵⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 251; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 601-02; cf. Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320; Morris, *Matthew*, 383.

⁵⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235; cf. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423-24.

⁶⁰ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320.

⁶¹ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 251; Morris, *Matthew*, 383; Witherington, *Matthew*, 293. In Matthew, Jesus miraculously works through no more than a few words more than once (8:3, 32; 9:6; 12:13; 15:28).

⁶² Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; cf. France, *Matthew*, 570.

⁶³ Gundry, *Matthew*, 299; Keener, *Matthew*, 407; cf. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 517.

⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:507; Gundry, *Matthew*, 299; cf. France, *Matthew*, 570.

⁶⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, "29-31," para. 1; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:508; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 602; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320; Morris, *Matthew*, 383; Nolland, *Matthew*, 602.

⁶⁶ Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424.

not unlike all the disciples moments earlier—but this time for rescue (14:30; cf. 26).⁶⁷ Peter again calls Jesus “Lord” (κύριε).⁶⁸ Most basically, this panicked plea for rescue—“Lord, save me!” (κύριε, σῶσόν με, 30)—is a cry of deliverance echoing the disciples’ earlier imploration on the same sea (8:25).⁶⁹ With this sense, Matthew elsewhere uses σῶζω in reference to saving from “natural dangers and afflictions,” including death (8:25; 16:25; 24:22; 27:40, 42, 49) and disease (9:21, 22).⁷⁰ Rescue from severe harm (potentially even death) is clearly the immediate focus.⁷¹ However, textual clues suggest Matthew uses this account of physical rescue to point paradigmatically to more. First, Peter’s two references to Jesus as “Lord” and other markers of Jesus’s divine status in the story establish Jesus as more than Peter’s lifeguard. Second, the scene rings with parallels to David’s plea for God to save him from the encroaching waters in Psalm 69 (esp. Ps 69:1-3, 14ff.).⁷² Third, Matthew elsewhere uses σῶζω to mean “save/preserve from eternal death” (1:21; 10:22; 19:25; 24:13).⁷³ Jesus’s earlier solitary prayer hints at Jesus’s atoning death—the means by which Jesus will save (σῶζω) his people from their sins (1:21; 26:28; cf. 20:28). Peter’s plea (coupled with Jesus’s rescue) anticipates Jesus’s future humiliation and exaltation as the Savior from sin and sin’s effects: “There is undeniably a paradigmatic character to this cry for salvation. In the moment of most dire

⁶⁷ Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Nolland, *Matthew*, 602; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:508.

⁶⁸ As Wilkins observes, “The same Lord who could walk on the water himself and then enable Peter to walk on the water is more than able to save him from sinking” (Wilkins, *Matthew*, 517).

⁶⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 236; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 508; France, *Matthew*, 571; Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424; Nolland, *Matthew*, 602; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:30,” para. 1; Turner, *Matthew*, 373; Witherington, *Matthew*, 293.

⁷⁰ BDAG, s.v. “σῶζω,” 1.

⁷¹ Morris, *Matthew*, 384.

⁷² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:508; Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 321; Nolland, *Matthew*, 602; cf. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “29-31,” para. 1; Turner, *Matthew*, 373.

⁷³ BDAG, s.v. “σῶζω,” 2.

human need, there is but one cry, just as there is but one source of salvation.”⁷⁴

Jesus had promptly (εὐθέως) dismissed the disciples (22) and quickly (εὐθύς) responded to the disciples’ terror in the boat (27), so also Jesus responds immediately (εὐθύς) to his fearful and faltering disciple (31).⁷⁵ Alongside Peter’s cry, Jesus’s act of rescue has overtones beyond the pre-dawn Galilean event. Previously, God reached down and drew his people out of waters (Ps 18:15-16; 144:5-8; cf. 2 Sam 22:17), and Jesus likewise stretched out his hand and took hold of Peter.⁷⁶ This historical, miraculous rescue recalls God’s past salvation of his people and foreshadows the future spiritual rescue Jesus will procure. As God walks on water, so does Jesus. As God rescues his people from the engulfing waters, so does Jesus.⁷⁷

In addition to saving his disciple, the Savior also corrects his follower with two terms largely unique to Matthew: labeling Peter with the adjective ὀλιγόπιστος, and challenging him by asking why he “doubted” (ἐδίστασας; 14:31).⁷⁸ Commentators agree that Jesus here identifies a deficiency in Peter’s faith, but they characterize that deficiency differently. Some take Peter’s faith to lack strength and stability.⁷⁹ Others describe his faith as inadequate, small, or impoverished.⁸⁰ Though not entirely distinct

⁷⁴ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424.

⁷⁵ Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Nolland, *Matthew*, 602; cf. Morris, *Matthew*, 384n68.

⁷⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. V.A.4, “29-31,” para. 1; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:508-09; Gundry, *Matthew*, 300; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 321n48; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:31,” para. 1.

⁷⁷ Jesus’s rescue here of Peter may also uniquely—that is, compared with other instances of Peter’s stumbling in Matthew (16:21-23; 17:1-8, 24-27; 26:35-46, 58, 69-75)—prepare readers “to see that Jesus can likewise restore him following his denials” (Wiarda, *Interpreting Gospel Narratives*, 184).

⁷⁸ In Matthew, ὀλιγόπιστος appears four times (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8), and elsewhere in (either the NT or LXX) only in Luke’s parallel to Matthew 6:30 (Luke 12:28). The cognate ὀλιγοπιστία (Matt 17:20) and the verb διστάζω (Matt 14:31; 28:17) only appear in Matthew’s Gospel.

⁷⁹ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 140; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “29-31,” para. 1; cf. Turner, *Matthew*, 373.

⁸⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:509; France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 274; France, *Matthew*, 571; Keener, *Matthew*, 407; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:31,” para. 2; Witherington, *Matthew*, 293; Michael J. Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew’s Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 182; Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 181. See also BDAG, s.v. “ὀλιγόπιστος;” Gerhard Barth, “ὀλιγόπιστος;”

from these characterizations, another understanding of Jesus’s critique is possible, preferable, and helpful in light of the surrounding context, other instances of *ὀλιγόπιστος* (and its cognate *ὀλιγοπιστία*), as well as the details of this pericope. Moments earlier Peter exhibited model confidence in his request and descent onto the water. Here, Peter’s present (even if deficient) faith is far preferred to the rejection by Jesus’s hometown (13:53-58) and that implied by Herod’s interpretation (14:1 ff.).⁸¹ On the other hand, Peter’s faltering faith on the water contrasts negatively with the Canaanite woman whom Jesus will soon laud as possessing great faith (15:28).⁸² In this narrative inset, Peter is “paradoxically a model both of faith and of lack of faith.”⁸³

Though occurring only a handful of times in the Gospel, the terms *ὀλιγόπιστος* and *ὀλιγοπιστία* play a consistent and important role in Matthew’s presentation of the disciples and discipleship.⁸⁴ Only Jesus uses *ὀλιγόπιστος* and only to label his own followers in probing questions (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). First, Jesus affirms God’s care as an antidote to anxiety about daily needs and confronts his audience’s worry about such matters (6:25-34).⁸⁵ Next, Jesus critiques the disciples’ inadequate trust in the midst of the first Galilean storm (8:26).⁸⁶ After Jesus’s water-top confrontation of Peter, Jesus later

ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 506, Logos Bible Software.

⁸¹ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 161-62.

⁸² Wilkins, *Matthew*, 517; Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 102-03; Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew’s Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text-Connoted Reader Is Informed* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 60-61.

⁸³ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 299; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 602.

⁸⁴ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 74, 161; Witherington, *Matthew*, 152. See also Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 101-12.

⁸⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 126; France, *Matthew*, 270; cf. Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 74; Nolland, *Matthew*, 313; Witherington, *Matthew*, 152; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 165, Logos Bible Software.

⁸⁶ France, *Matthew*, 336-37; Gundry, *Matthew*, 156; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 222; Keener, *Matthew*, 278-79; Nolland, *Matthew*, 371; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 351.

rebukes the Twelve’s capacity to perceive and trust though they had twice experienced Christ’s miraculous provision (16:9-11).⁸⁷ Each time (including 14:31), Jesus’s disciples are confronted with a potential crisis out of which they cannot rescue themselves and in which they explicitly or implicitly experience a measure of worry.⁸⁸ Thus, France concludes *δλιγόπιστος* is “used especially in Matthew for those who are afraid instead of trusting God to provide for their survival or need.”⁸⁹ Jesus later adds that the disciples possess *δλιγοπιστία* (“little faith”) in conjunction with their inability to exorcise a demon (17:20). Adding this instance with the others, “the context in each case is a situation of need or danger which requires the supernatural power of God (or of Jesus) to solve it, and in each case their *πίστις*, practical trust proves unequal to the situation”⁹⁰

However, the deficiency lies not in what the disciples do not know, as if a lack of revelation or information justifies their crises of faith. The disciples have room for growth in their understanding of Jesus, but that room for growth is not the hindrance signaled by *δλιγόπιστος*.⁹¹ Jesus’s parent-like reprovings indicate that their “little faith”—even though understandable in a fallen world—is not justifiable.⁹² Michael Wilkins suggests about Peter’s stagger on the sea, “Faith is not like a commodity of which Peter needs more.”⁹³ Instead, each time the disciples receive a reorientation of their perspective to counteract their “little faith” (6:26-30; 8:26-27; 16:9-11; 17:20). In these cases, what

⁸⁷ France, *Matthew*, 610; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 70, “16:8,” para. 1; Turner, *Matthew*, 400-01; Witherington, *Matthew*, 308; cf. Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 350; Morris, *Matthew*, 416; Nolland, *Matthew*, 653.

⁸⁸ Davies and Allison, 1:656; cf. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 459; France, *Matthew*, 609-10; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 639.

⁸⁹ France, *Matthew*, 270; cf. Edwards, *Matthew’s Narrative Portrait*, 59.

⁹⁰ France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 273. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:656.

⁹¹ For understanding and faith in Matthew, see Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 107-11; France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 274.

⁹² Witherington compares Jesus’s correction in these instances to “that of a concerned parent, not that of a harsh drill-sergeant” (Witherington, *Matthew*, 423).

⁹³ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 517.

they know about God or Jesus consistently exercises insufficient influence over how they interpret themselves and their situations.⁹⁴ In other words, what the disciples believed about Jesus was not functioning as a control belief in their immediate evaluation of themselves and their circumstances.⁹⁵ Pierre observes that “through faith, people begin to see the world as God sees (Matt 13:15).”⁹⁶ Rather than beginning to see the world as God sees, the disciples’ theological convictions were dwarfed by their momentary concerns and interpretations.

This understanding of by *ὀλιγόπιστος* explains Peter’s experience and Jesus’s rebuke. Moments earlier, Jesus had asserted his presence as the grounds for replacing fear with confidence in response to the disciple’s terror and misinterpretation of their circumstances (26-27). Peter subsequently demonstrates confidence in the presence of Jesus but begins to waver in fear as he considers himself and his situation in light of the power of the wind and the waves instead of the presence and care of Christ (30). What Peter had just confessed about Christ—in words from the boat and in the cry for rescue (and confirmed in the act of getting out of the boat)—did not influence, in the moment, how Peter saw himself and his situation. In this perspectival shift, Peter’s attention was divided and he momentarily “doubted” or cognitively “hesitated” (*ἐδίστασας*; cf. 28:17) as he walked to his Master.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones contends the disciples’ faith is insufficient because it is constrained to matters of salvation rather than extending “to the whole of life and to everything in life” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976], 397). See also Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 353; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:74.

⁹⁵ For Nicholas Wolterstorff, “control beliefs” are not a fixed set within an overall framework of belief. Instead, the label “control” is a reference to how they function on a given occasion. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 69-70, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁶ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 77.

⁹⁷ See France, *Matthew*, 570-71; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:31,” para. 2; Witherington, *Matthew*, 293; cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 235; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424. For Rabbinic links between “little faith” and “doublemindedness,” see Rudolf Bultmann, “πιστεύω, πίστις, πιστός, πιστόω, ἄπιστος, ἀπιστέω, ἀπιστία, ὀλιγόπιστος, ὀλιγοπιστία,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 199-200,

Table 3. Summary of situational and existential elements in Matthew 14:28-31

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Situational Elements</i>	<i>Existential Elements</i>
14:28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter responds to Jesus with a request to come. • Peter’s response highlights Jesus’s divinity. • The stormy weather continues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter hears Jesus’s reply and responds, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” • Jesus hears Peter’s response (see 14:29). • The other disciples hear Peter and observe this interaction.
14:29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus responds to Peter, and Peter walks on the water to Jesus. • Peter’s walking on the water highlights Jesus’s divinity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus responds to Peter by commanding him to come and enabling him to walk on the water. Jesus sees Peter walking to him. • Peter obediently gets out of the boat and walks on the water to Jesus. • The other disciples observe this event.
14:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter sees the wind, begins to sink, and cries to Jesus. • Peter’s cry to Jesus highlights Jesus’s divinity and status as Savior or rescuer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter notices the wind’s effects on the sea and is afraid. He begins to sink and cries to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” Peter has experienced “little faith” and doubted (see 14:31). • Jesus sees Peter and hears his cry (see 14:31).
14:31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus quickly rescues and addresses Peter. • Jesus’s rescue and address of Peter further emphasizes Jesus’s divinity and role as Savior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus immediately responds to Peter’s request, reaches out his hand, and takes hold of him. Jesus confronts Peter, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” • Peter is rescued by Jesus and hears Jesus’s verbal response.

Situationally, the overnight storm continues as Peter calls and Jesus responds. Peter descends and miraculously goes to Jesus on the water but falters, leading to rescue and confrontation by Jesus. At each turn, this self-contained story reinforces Matthew’s

presentation of Jesus as the divine rescuer who will one day rescue his people from their deadliest threat, their sin. Existentially, Jesus and Peter are the exclusive focus, though the end of the overall account (14:33) suggests the disciples in the boat were privy to observing these events. Jesus hears Peter's request and commands him to come. As Peter walks to Jesus, Jesus hears Peter's cry, sees him sinking, and immediately reaches out to rescue him, after which Jesus confronts Peter about his response to his experience. From Peter's perspective, the disciple calls out to his Master, and upon receiving a favorable response, obediently descends onto the water and walks out to Jesus. While walking, Peter's attention zeros in on the stormy conditions around him, he becomes afraid, begins to sink into the sea, and cries out to his only hope for rescue. Immediately, Peter experiences the saving hand of Jesus and subsequently hears the probing words and question from Jesus. A summary of the situational and existential elements from this portion of the passage is provided in table 3 above.

Understanding 14:32-33

In a reversal of Peter's descent (*καταβὰς*) out of the boat (14:29), both Jesus and Peter ascend (*ἀναβάντων*) into the boat (14:32).⁹⁸ Dramatically, the wind ceases (14:32)—a sudden calm reminiscent of Jesus's earlier storm stilling (8:26).⁹⁹ Matthew previously focused on Jesus's rebuke (*ἐπετίμησεν*) of the winds and sea (8:26), but this time the evangelist only indicates that “‘the wind stopped,’ not apparently in response to a command of Jesus (as in 8:26) but simply in response to his presence in the boat.”¹⁰⁰ Here Matthew uses the episode's details to add to his confirmation of Jesus's divine

⁹⁸ Nolland, *Matthew*, 602.

⁹⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:32,” para. 1; cf. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 603; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 517.

¹⁰⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424; cf. Turner, *Matthew*, 373.

status and capacity to rescue: just as God stills the storms (Job 26:11-12; Ps 65:7; 89:9-10; 107:29; cf. Jon 1:15), so also Jesus's presence causes the wind to cease.¹⁰¹

The sudden, dramatic, miraculous stilling of the wind also segues into the two-fold response of those in the boat, the climax of the episode (14:33).¹⁰² First, the evangelist reports Jesus's followers "worshiped" (*προσεκύνησαν*) him, a term Matthew uses nine other times to refer to others' response to Jesus. Four times those seeking healing or help from Jesus "kneel" before him as they make their request (8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20).¹⁰³ Three uses are tied to both the desires and responses of the magi (2:2, 11; cf. 2:8), and the remaining two to post-resurrection reactions of Jesus's followers (28:9, 17). In the birth and resurrection narratives—the bookends of the Gospel—the response occurs as an explicit act (without reference to a request for personal benefit) of honoring, even worshiping, the young or resurrected Jesus.¹⁰⁴ In three other instances, Jesus is not the object of *προσκυνέω*: when Satan tempts Jesus to worship (4:9), Jesus's immediate rebuke wherein he affirms God as the only worthy object of worship (4:10; cf. Deut 6:13), and the unforgiving servant's initial response to his master in a parable (18:26). Jesus's strong rebuke of Satan, coupled with the multiple instances of Jesus as

¹⁰¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:509-10; cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 236; Keener, *Matthew*, 408; Turner, *Matthew*, 372; Witherington, *Matthew*, 294.

¹⁰² Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, "32-33," para. 1. Hagner goes farther: "The present passage and verse are a climactic point in the narrative thus far" (Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 425).

¹⁰³ Hagner is not persuaded that "worship" fits the context of these passages and reads instead "a great act of respect and homage" (Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 198; cf. 248; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 580), except for the Canaanite mother (15:25) who "began to worship" (Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 442). Others see at least an allusion to worship in Matthew's portrayal of these instances (Keener, *Matthew*, 105; Morris, *Matthew*, 37; Nolland, *Matthew*, 603).

¹⁰⁴ About the instances in the infancy narrative, Brown and Roberts observe more than an effort to "pay homage" and instead affirm that "Matthew seems to be signaling worship as the right response to Jesus" (Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 35; cf. Morris, *Matthew*, 37). Davies and Allison propose "worship" as a likely and fitting translation "almost everywhere else in Matthew" (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:237; cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009], 130-31).

the unqualified object of προσκυνέω, confirms Matthew’s repeated intention to present Jesus—Immanuel (1:23)—as worthy of worship, especially in the current scene.¹⁰⁵

However, Matthew’s exaltation of Jesus—building as it has throughout the account—is not constrained to a single word. The disciples’ in-boat worship indicated by προσκυνέω could have involved some form of physical expression, but Matthew focuses particularly on their verbal confession.¹⁰⁶ On nine occasions in this Gospel, Jesus is explicitly identified as the Son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ).¹⁰⁷ Only three times, however, is the title confessional (14:33; 16:16; 27:54), the first time occurring in the present pericope.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the disciples’ affirmation plays an important role in Matthew’s narrative, anticipating Peter’s later and emphatic response to Jesus’s enquiry (16:16) and contributing to Matthew’s building Christology.¹⁰⁹ In this vein, Hagner declares, “The present passage and verse are a climactic point in the narrative thus far.”¹¹⁰ Jesus’s identity as the unique Son of God is no mere sidebar in Matthew’s Gospel, as other occasions of similar (but slightly nuanced) language suggest.¹¹¹ The “truly” (ἀληθῶς) heading the disciples’ present proclamation emphasizes their affirmation and creates a parallel to the centurion’s confession upon Jesus’s death and ensuing events

¹⁰⁵ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 141; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 518; cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, 603.

¹⁰⁶ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 141; Nolland, *Matthew*, 603. On the possibility of a physical component to προσκυνέω here, see Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 603; Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 322; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 518. See also Hagner, *Matthew* 14-28, 424; Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 253; Keener, *Matthew*, 408; Turner, *Matthew*, 373. Compare Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:33,” para. 1.

¹⁰⁷ See 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54. Jesus uses the plural form υἱοὶ θεοῦ in the peacemaking beatitude (5:9).

¹⁰⁸ On six occasions, the title is used variously by those opposed to Jesus: by Satan (4:3, 6), demons (8:29), the high priest (26:63), and passers-by at his crucifixion (27:40, 43). The instance at 27:43 occurs in a quote of Jesus’s speech, but it is a quote hurled by Jewish leaders in mockery of Jesus.

¹⁰⁹ Hagner, *Matthew* 14-28, 424-25; Witherington, *Matthew*, 294; cf. France, *Matthew*, 571-72.

¹¹⁰ Hagner, *Matthew* 14-28, 425.

¹¹¹ See 1:18, 20; 2:15; 3:17; 17:5. Additionally, “Jesus refers to God as ‘Father’ some 44 times (compared with 4 in Mark and 17 in Luke)” (France, *Evangelist and Teacher*, 294). Nolland also points to the father-son relationship alluded to in some parables (21:37, 38; 22:2) containing father-son relationships. Nolland, *Matthew*, 603n108; cf. 42.

(27:54).¹¹² The account also contributes to Matthew's presentation of the disciples' growing understanding of Jesus's identity.¹¹³ Whereas they previously and openly wondered about Jesus's identity (8:27), now they confess him to be the Son of God (14:33).¹¹⁴ For the disciples, their confession likely reflected messianic convictions (16:16; 26:63), though their comprehension of Jesus as the Son had assuredly not yet reached the status of post-resurrection confession in either scope or conviction.¹¹⁵ Ultimately the confession draws attention to Jesus.¹¹⁶ While the disciples may not here possess the conviction they will one day associate with the title, "there is no reason to doubt that for Matthew this confession is a full and true confession."¹¹⁷ In a section of the Gospel concerned with divergent responses to Jesus, Matthew's presentation of Jesus's power and authority, Jesus's rebuke of Peter's "little faith," and the disciples' climactic confession together invite readers to join the disciples in worshiping Jesus by viewing and confessing him as the Son of God, especially in fear-inviting circumstances.

In this final portion of the pericope, situational focus returns to the boat as Jesus and Peter come off the water and into the vessel, and the wind ceases. The story concludes as the disciples who remained in the boat worship Jesus. Theologically both the sudden calming of the wind and the disciples response of worship highlight Jesus as the Son of God and worthy of worship. Existentially, Jesus, Peter, and the other disciples can be considered separately. Considering Jesus's experience, he walks with Peter on the

¹¹² Gundry, *Matthew*, 301; Keener, *Matthew*, 408; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:510; France, *Matthew*, 571; Morris, *Matthew*, 384.

¹¹³ Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, "32-33," para. 2; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:510, France, *Matthew*, 571-72; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, "14:33," para. 2; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 518.

¹¹⁴ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 572.

¹¹⁵ Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 141; Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, "32-33," para. 3; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 424; Keener, *Matthew*, 408; Morris, *Matthew*, 384-85; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, "14:33," para. 2; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 518.

¹¹⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:510.

¹¹⁷ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 322.

Table 4. Summary of situational and existential elements in Matthew 14:32-33

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Situational Elements</i>	<i>Existential Elements</i>
14:32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus and Peter get into the boat, and the wind stops. • The stopping of the wind highlights Jesus’s divinity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus walks with Peter to the boat, gets off the water and into the boat. Jesus calms the sea (means unstated). • Peters walks with Jesus on the water to the boat gets off the water, and into the boat. • The disciples in the boat witness this event (see 14:33).
14:33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disciples who had remained in the boat respond in worship and confession. • The disciples’ response to Jesus highlights Jesus as the Son of God and worthy of worship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disciples in the boat worship Jesus, saying “Truly you are the Son of God” • Jesus does not correct or stop their response to him.

water to the boat, gets into the boat, and calms the sea (though the means is left unstated). As he witnesses the response of the disciples, he does not correct or stop their worship. Peter’s experience mirrors Jesus’s as they return to the boat and get back in. The other disciples witness what has transpired with Jesus and Peter, and they respond in worship, confessing Jesus to be the Son of God. A summary of the situational and existential elements from the pericope’s concluding verses is provided in table 4 above.

Seeking Connections with Matthew 14:22-33 and Counseling’s Framework

A thickening understanding enables counselors to seek ways the narrative’s situational features and existential dynamics intersect with counseling’s four-fold framework: the situational details (especially, though not exclusively hardships) of a person’s experience (i.e., “heat”), the person’s sinful response to those situational details

(i.e., “thorns), God’s provisions for change (i.e., “cross”), and the person’s God-honoring responses to the details (i.e., “fruit”).¹¹⁸

Heat and Matthew 14:22-33

The episode’s characters experience multiple forms of situational hardships both in the context and within the confines of the pericope. First, Jesus faces growing opposition within Israel and his ministry is becoming geographically distanced from Galilee and Jewish crowds (esp. 15:21-38).¹¹⁹ In these repeated rejections, Jesus experiences the difficulty of being sinned against by others.

In the boat, a storm opposes the disciples throughout the night during their journey across the sea, a form of general life hardships: “The idea of human suffering that is unavoidable with the word βασανίζω (“to torture”) is probably intentional.”¹²⁰ Prior to Jesus coming to them on the water, the disciples also faced a period of time without Jesus and (apparently) without awareness of how or when they would be reunited with their Master.¹²¹ Even in Jesus’s prior withdrawal, the disciples were likely with him.¹²² As the pericope makes clear, though the disciples are physically separated from Jesus, he remains attentive to them in their needs. Jesus has in no way wronged the disciples by sending them on ahead, but in the Gospel, Jesus only previously sent them away one other time and with the authority to perform the ministry for which he sent them (10:1, 5ff.). During this overnight period, the disciples’ experience of separation from Jesus

¹¹⁸ Timothy S Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, N.C.: New Growth Press, 2008), 81-85. See also Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: B & H Academic, forthcoming), chap. 10.

¹¹⁹ France, *Matthew*, 601-02; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:545; Nolland, *Matthew*, 631.

¹²⁰ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 318. Blomberg detects the possibility of “an occult element at work here” (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 234; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:503).

¹²¹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 598; cf. Carson, *Matthew*, sec. 5.A.4, “22,” para. 2-4.

¹²² France, *Matthew*, 560.

should not be quickly dismissed. The impact of Jesus’s absence becomes apparent with his arrival when the disciples mistake him for a ghost. In their momentary misinterpretation, the disciples experience a mixture of general life hardships and short-lived false counsel. As sin-affected, finite creatures in a fallen world (i.e., general life hardships), we all have the innate capacity to misinterpret situations—that is, to provide false counsel to ourselves. The disciples experience this aspect of human existence as they see an unexpected sight drawing towards them through the wind and the waves.

The final experience of hardship in this passage comes as Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. Peter’s experience includes the stormy weather described above. As Peter descends onto the water, that storm continues to blow. As Peter approaches Jesus, he becomes acutely aware of the ongoing tempest, and the second aspect of his hardship develops: he begins to sink into the raging sea, another example of a general life hardship. As Jesus’s confrontation of Peter makes plain, Peter has also experienced that same combination of general life hardships and false counsel in his misinterpretation of this experience. In his limitations, Peter neglected to account adequately for all the situational factors relevant to this moment.

Thorns and Matthew 14:22-33

The intersection of counseling’s thorns with this event centers on the responses of the disciples in the boat and Peter on the water. Parsing Matthew’s description of the disciples’ reaction in the boat, both their exclamation “It is a ghost!” and their cry (ἐκραξαν) are examples of expressed thorns (26). Leon Morris believes the disciples’ cry “would have been an inarticulate shriek.”¹²³ Matthew not only identifies these verbal reactions, but he also twice draws attention to the internal experience of fear associated with them: they were terrified (ἐταράχθησαν), and they cried out from fear (ἀπὸ τοῦ

¹²³ Morris, *Matthew*, 382; cf. Witherington, *Matthew*, 291.

φόβου), the latter included “to underline further the sense of terror.”¹²⁴

Matthew’s description of the disciples’ cry as coming from fear illustrates the association between expressed emotion and internal experience. Their declaration and audible shriek resulted from their internal response to their immediate situation. The weather had previously aroused the disciples’ fear (8:26; cf. 8:24-25), but Matthew ties their current experience to their interpretation of what they think they see.¹²⁵ It is difficult to know precisely what the disciples mean by “ghost” (φάντασμα) and what this declaration indicates about the disciples’ personally-held beliefs.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Matthew positions his readers to know that the disciples misinterpret what they see. In their error, they experienced as a threat that which would prove to be God’s provision. A similar experience accompanied Matthew’s only other use of *ταράσσω*: Herod’s troubled (ἐταράχθη) response (and all Jerusalem with him) upon hearing the magi’s enquiry about the one who had been born king of the Jews (2:3). In both instances, a sensory experience (i.e., hearing in 2:3, seeing in 14:26) and the ensuing perception of a threat resulted in unsettledness.¹²⁷ In both cases, however, perception did not match reality: what was read as a threat was in truth God’s provision in the person of his Son.

The incident on the water manifests similar features while providing additional details. Peter’s fear again expresses itself in a cry (ἐκραξεν; 30). Additionally, Matthew links Peter’s experience of fear with his perception (and implicit interpretation) of his circumstances. Rather than scared by an apparition, Peter becomes afraid as he assesses the apparent threat posed by the wind and sea. Unlike moments prior when the disciples

¹²⁴ Nolland, *Matthew*, 600.

¹²⁵ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516.

¹²⁶ Turner, *Matthew*, 372. Compare Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:505; France, *Matthew*, 569; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 423; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 600; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 320; Nolland, *Matthew*, 600; Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 64, “14:26,” para. 3; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 516; Witherington, *Matthew*, 291.

¹²⁷ On the sensory experience leading to fear, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:237, 2:505; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 155-56.

mistook the figure on the water, now the presence of Jesus is unmistakable. Jesus had declared his presence as the salve for the disciples' fear in the boat, and on that basis, Peter began to walk to his Master. However, as Jesus's correction suggests, Peter's confidence in Christ was then supplanted by his perception of the nautical and meteorological threat around him. Peter's sense of peril increases as he begins to sink with the result that he cries out for rescue.

Examining both the in-boat and on-water experiences side-by-side, the incidents illustrate multiple dynamics about fear. First, both groups perceived a threat: the disciples' threat was the mysterious figure on the water, and Peter's threat was the tumultuous sea and blowing wind. Second, in both cases, something they valued was threatened. Peter's salvation cry indicates he saw his life as threatened, and though not stated, it seems reasonable that the disciples likewise understood their lives to be endangered. Third, their experiences of these threats resulted in their fearful responses, both feelings of terror and exclamations. Fourth, their responses revealed their (understandably) high valuation of their lives. Fifth, their fearful reactions also revealed that they interpreted each threat as posing a real danger to their lives. This interpretation of the danger involved at least two assessments: an evaluation of the threat itself, as well as an estimation of the resources available to resist the threat and protect themselves. In both cases, they quickly evaluated the threat to be high and estimated their available resources to be inadequate. Jesus's words of comfort and revelation to the disciples in the boat eliminate the threat. Jesus's confrontation of Peter indicates that Peter overestimated the threat of the storm by underestimating the resources available to him in Jesus to endure the threat and remain protected. In other words, Peter's evaluation of his circumstances was controlled by his perception of the wind rather than his consideration of Jesus and Jesus's presence with Peter.

In both incidents, Jesus's followers seem to react intuitively. However, the seeming spontaneity does not absolve them of responsibility for these "extemporaneous

expressions of the dynamic heart.”¹²⁸ For readers sympathetic to the disciples’ instinctive reactions, such sympathies do not temper the value of this pericope for addressing other instances of fear.¹²⁹ Jesus’s response in both cases implies as much. Rather than dismissing the disciples’ in-boat experience, Jesus calls them away from their error by exhorting them to put off fear and put on courage founded on a corrected interpretation of who was before them. Likewise, Jesus’s correction of Peter—parental rather than judicial—exposes what was faulty in Peter’s reaction to what was around him.¹³⁰

Cross and Matthew 14:22-33

Unmistakably, this pericope focuses supremely on Jesus as God’s provision. The opening verses’ connections to prior and subsequent incidents in the Gospel as well as Jesus’s rescue of Peter hint at Jesus’s atoning death to rescue his people from sin. Likewise, echoes in the prior passage and Jesus on the mountain elevate Jesus as the redeemer greater than Moses. Like a steady drumbeat, this account repeatedly stresses Jesus’s divine status and its consequences—especially his authority over nature in walking on water, enabling his follower to walk on the water, and the sea’s sudden calming; his presence as the sufficient reason to assuage the disciples’ fear (cf. 1:23; 28:20; Rom 8:10); and his rescue of Peter from out of the sea. Peter’s cry for help also points to the gift of prayer as an important means by which Christ’s people rely on the help he supplies. Though the subject of Christ’s prayer remains veiled, his activity of praying on the mountain also reminds of his ongoing intercessory activity for his people (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), an incalculable gift.¹³¹ His prayer, as a model for Jesus’s

¹²⁸ On individual responsibility for intuitive responses, see Pierre, *Dynamic Heart*, 37.

¹²⁹ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 252.

¹³⁰ Welch observes two ways to say “Don’t worry”: as a “judicial warning” or as “a parental encouragement” (Edward T. Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* [Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2007], 9, Kindle).

¹³¹ See Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 599-600.

followers to emulate, is also a provisional example as a response to growing rejection. In his withdrawal, Jesus praying gives an example for his people to follow in their response to opposition, rejection, and other forms of life's heat.

Fruit and Matthew 14:22-23

The account also contains examples of good fruit. First, Peter's cry for rescue likewise points to prayer, albeit in a different way than Jesus's prayer. Though Peter erred in his doubt on the water, his reaction to plead for Jesus's help is the right response to an experience of fear. Rather than withdrawing or turning inward and attempting self-rescue, Peter's look to Jesus models for Christ's followers how to respond when they stumble in the heat of life. Second, the disciples' in-boat worship of Christ provides another example of faithfully responding to Christ and his provisions.

Jesus's responses to the disciples and to Peter also provide examples for counselors to emulate with their counselees. In both instances, the disciples erred. In the first, Jesus addresses their concerns with an encouragement to have courage and not to fear, but he couples that with the truth of his identity and presence. In this response, Jesus gives counselors an example of acknowledging and addressing their counselees' concerns and to do so rooted in the revelation of God and the promise of Christ's presence with his people. To neglect either would ill-serve the counselee.¹³² Moreover, Jesus's gracious rescue and confrontation of Peter—just moments after Jesus had addressed Peter's in-boat fears—demonstrates a combination of charity and correction counselors often must show to counselees in the slow and (often) unsteady process of growth in Christ-likeness.¹³³

¹³² See Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 273.

¹³³ See Jay E. Adams, *The Gospels of Matthew and Mark*, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 1999), 125-26.

Exploring How Matthew 14:22-33 Applies to Counselees

The last stage of applying a text in counseling and for counseling involves exploring how that passage applies to counselees and their experiences. Matthew 14:22-33 helps counselors dissect and respond to fear and has exercised formative influence on occasions of my own pastoral care.

Dissecting Fear

Humanity is not immune to fear: “Fear is natural to us. We don’t have to learn it. We experience fear and anxiety even before there is any logical reason for them.”¹³⁴ So also David Powlison observes, “When you look at your world, it’s easy to find reasons to be anxious.”¹³⁵ This common human experience appears repeatedly in Matthew’s Gospel, across which the evangelist employs fear-related vocabulary thirty-nine times in thirty-five verses.¹³⁶ The current episode is one of four passages in the Gospel where terms for fear are clustered (cf. 6:25-34; 10:19, 26-31; 28:4-10), suggesting that the present passage offers an important contribution to that theme in the Gospel. Some biblical counselors distinguish between worry, fear, and anxiety.¹³⁷ However, the flexibility with which Matthew, for example, uses *ταράσσω* (2:3; 14:26) and *φοβέω* (1:20; 14:27) in reference to both immediate and distant anxieties suggests more continuity than discontinuity between various experiences of fear. Consequently, the terms “worry,” “anxiety,” and “fear,” are used synonymously below.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Welch, *Running Scared*, 19.

¹³⁵ David Powlison, *Overcoming Anxiety: Relief for Worried People* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), 5.

¹³⁶ For a survey of this vocabulary in the Gospel of Matthew, see appendix 2.

¹³⁷ For example, see Welch, *Running Scared*, 50.

¹³⁸ See Robert D. Jones, *Why Worry? Getting to the Heart of Your Anxiety*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2018), 28n1.

The anatomy of fear. The sea experiences of the disciples and Peter in our episode illustrate that our fearful experiences frequently involve five elements:

1. A perceived threat,
2. An object of value we perceive to be threatened,
3. Our responses (expressed and internal) to the threat,
4. Our valuation (as part of a complex and dynamic matrix of values) of the object we perceive to be threatened, and
5. Our interpretation of the danger posed by the threat to the object threatened.¹³⁹

The perceived threat (no. 1) and object of value (no. 2) are both part of the situational heat of a person's experience, the object of value frequently being one of God's common-grace blessings (e.g., life, family, job, etc.). For sinful fear, our responses (no. 3) to the threat (both expressed and internalized) are an example of sinful fruit within the framework's thorns, and responses of appropriate concern are types of good fruit. Our valuation of the object (no. 4) and interpretation of the danger (no. 5) are exposed in our fearful response to the perceived threat, and these components represent the roots within the framework's thorns and fruit. Our interpretation of the danger (no. 5) consists of two factors: our beliefs about the threat, and our beliefs about the resources available either to resist (or endure) that threat or protect the object threatened.

In addition to the disciples and Peter on the sea as considered above, Matthew's presentation of fear throughout his Gospel repeatedly illustrates this understanding of the emotional experience of fear. For example, Matthew writes that Herod was "troubled" (*ἐταράχθη*), and all Jerusalem with him, upon hearing the magi's testimony (2:3; cf. 2:1-2). This same verb (*ταράσσω*) describes the disciples' reaction

¹³⁹ Ontologically, the value we place on the object and our interpretation of the threat precede and lead to our response. However, because our response exposes our values and interpretations, responses to fear are listed before values and interpretation here.

when they first saw the unexpected figure on the water. In both cases, the experience of fear is preceded by a sensory experience—hearing (*ἀκούσας*; 2:3) or seeing (*ιδόντες*; 14:26)—or a perception of something associated with a threat. Elsewhere, Matthew uses *φοβέω* along with a verb of perception—*ἀκούω* (“hear,” 2:22; 17:6), *ὁράω* (“see,” 9:8; 27:54), *βλέπω* (“see,” 14:30)—at least five times.¹⁴⁰ Other instances of fear in the Gospel are likewise closely tied to the perception of a threat (e.g., 8:26; 14:5; 28:4), and though the disciples faced a “general life hardship” as their apparent threat, a counselee’s perceived threats can come from any of Robert Jones’s five types of suffering.¹⁴¹

When fear appears, the threat—irrespective of source—has been viewed as a danger to something valued. Again, the disciples and Peter saw their lives as threatened. When Joseph and his small family were returning from Egypt, he heard Herod’s son was reigning, and Jesus’s adoptive father saw a possible threat to the child entrusted to him (2:22). Later, the Jewish leaders perceived a threat to their reputations and influence by the crowds (the potential retribution of Rome if a popular riot ensued) if those leaders acted on their desires toward Jesus (21:26, 46).¹⁴²

In each instance of a threat to a valued object, a response ensues. In addition to the disciples’ responses on the sea, Matthew documents others. For example, in response to Mary’s mysterious pregnancy (and perhaps the threat it posed to his own reputation), Joseph fearfully considered quietly ending the marriage before the angel intervened (1:18-25). In Jesus’s parable of the talents, the third servant feared the response of his master, and the servant responded by hiding the talent entrusted to him (25:24-25). However, fear’s responses are not merely (or always) expressed in words and actions; they are also experienced internally, especially as thoughts and particularly related to

¹⁴⁰ See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:508.

¹⁴¹ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *Gospel for Disordered Lives*, chap. 10.

¹⁴² Osborne, *Matthew*, chap. 90, “21:26,” para. 1; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 695.

imagined consequences if the perceived threat’s attack on the object of value is successful (recall Joseph and the threat posed by Archelaus). In its imagined portrait of the future after a successful attack, fear has an eschatology—not of the premillennial or amillennial variants—but a caricature of future life without the object of value (or with the object marred by the threat).¹⁴³

In these responses—external and internal—the relative value we place on the object under attack is exposed. If the threat is set against something of relatively low value, no significant response is elicited. So also, if we estimate the danger to be low, no noteworthy response results. When we respond in fear, those responses expose our desire to protect the treasured object from harm, and in this way our responses also uncover our estimation both of the threat itself and the resources (not) available to us to protect the object and neutralize the threat.

This delineation captures not only fear which exposes unwise or sinful heart dynamics, but it also envelopes other ways Matthew addresses experiences of fear. The Gospel admits that the experience of fear is not always inappropriate. As Powlison observes, “Anxiety, when you get to the bottom of it, is a God-given capacity for knowing that something bad is going on in your world—either in the past, the present, or the future.”¹⁴⁴ Our experience of worry warns us that something is amiss—either inside or outside of us. Joseph perceived a potential residual threat to the child’s life and withdrew to Galilee. Rather than criticizing Joseph’s fear and choice, Matthew regards this chain of events as the means by which prophecy found fulfillment in Jesus’s identification as a Nazarene (2:22-23). Also, Matthew writes that Jesus’s soul was troubled (*ἀδημονεῖν*) in anticipation of his immanent crucifixion (26:37). Jesus faced a

¹⁴³ Welch, *Running Scared*, 50ff.

¹⁴⁴ Powlison, *Overcoming Anxiety*, 4. Robert Kellemen identifies this capacity as the “God-given emotion” of “vigilance” (Robert W. Kellemen, *Anxiety: Anatomy and Cure* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012], 7, Kindle).

real threat, but he ultimately valued submission to the Father's will over self-preservation, as reflected in his response of obedience (26:39ff.; cf. Phil 2:8). The Gospel's depiction of fear in conjunction with a divine or angelic encounter (9:8; 27:54 cf. 10:28)—related to the OT language of “fear of the Lord” (Ps 34:11; Prov 1:7; Isa 11:2-3)—likewise presents an appropriate response to godly power and authority, a response frequently met with a message of comfort (from the perceived threat) in a command not to fear (e.g., 17:7; 28:5, 10).

The traits of sinful fear. Fear, in its basic anatomy, is not inherently sinful. Vocabulary does not distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate concern. Jones observes that *μεριμνάω* and cognates occur with both negative (e.g., Matt 6:25, 31) and positive (1 Cor 12:25; Phil 2:6) connotations in the NT, depending on context.¹⁴⁵ Noting this lexical flexibility, Jones describes sinful worry as “care or concern that gets out of control.”¹⁴⁶ Dissecting fear accurately also requires discerning between appropriate concern and fear that is the expression of indwelling sin.

Jones observes that desires are sinful when either something divinely forbidden is the object of desire, or when a desire for a permissible object becomes “inordinate or selfish.”¹⁴⁷ He further identifies three indicators of inordinate desire: (1) when the desire masters or consumes our thoughts, (2) when we are willing to sin in order to meet the desire, or (3) when we are willing to sin when the desire is unmet.¹⁴⁸ According to fear's anatomy, fear is a matter of desire: fear results when a desired (or valued) object is

¹⁴⁵ Jones, *Why Worry*, 4; cf. 28n2.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *Why Worry*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 51.

¹⁴⁸ Jones, *Uprooting Anger*, 54-56.

threatened, and from a desire either to neutralize the threat or protect the object. Applying Jones's taxonomy of sinful desire to fear, fear is sinful when any of the following apply:

1. The valued object is forbidden,
2. Either the object or the threat against it consumes our thinking,
3. We are willing to sin in an effort to neutralize the threat or protect the object, or
4. We would be willing to sin if the threat successfully attacks the valued object.

Each of these examples of sinful fear appears in Matthew's Gospel. Herod perceived his claim on authority over the Jewish people to be threatened in the report of the promised Messiah. In his effort to retain unchallenged authority over and against the promised One, Herod's valued object—his position of authority—would be rendered forbidden, the first type of sinful desire and fear. Peter's thoughts became dominated by the wind and waves, an example of the second way fear becomes sinful. Herod's slaughter of the children (2:16-18) is an example of the third type, and the Jewish leaders' willingness to conspire and have Jesus put death is an example of the fourth way.¹⁴⁹ As Jones observes generally for desires, fears are typically sinful not because they center on a forbidden object (no. 1) but because sinful fear is present through one of the other means of inordinate desire. Counselors have the opportunity not only to help their counselees understand the makeup of their fears but also to help them discern when their fear exposes sinful roots in order to guide counselees to respond faithfully to fear.

Responding to Fear

Again, Powlison observes that fear can helpfully point to something amiss either inside or outside of us. Consequently, the goal of addressing fear in counseling is

¹⁴⁹ The Gospel does not explicitly state that the Jewish leaders feared the impact of Jesus's growing popularity, but twice they feared the response of the people that might result if Jesus was arrested (21:26, 46). It follows that they likewise perceived Jesus as a threat because his growing influence diminished theirs, therefore they were willing to conspire to put him to death.

not necessarily to numb counselees against fear but to lead them to respond properly to it.¹⁵⁰ Matthew's Gospel guides counselors to speak truth and hope to fear by confronting sinful roots exposed in our obsession over the threat or the object—specifically our valuation of the threatened object, our interpretation of the threat and its lethality, and the resources available to resist or endure the threat.

With respect to our interpretations of perceived threats, the incidents on the sea illustrate the importance of accurate assessments. In the boat, the disciples did not simply overestimate the threat; they utterly misidentified as a threat the One who was God's provision for them (26; cf. 28:4-5, 10). Similar errant responses occur in the initial reaction of Joseph to Mary's pregnancy which he could not explain (1:18-25) and Herod's enduring response to the announcement of the newborn king (2:1ff). In the case of Peter on the water, Peter recognized a real threat posed by the wind and sea, but he severely underestimated God's provision in Jesus to enable Peter to endure and not succumb to that threat. Had Peter's perspective been controlled by truth about Jesus's power, presence, and provision, Peter's sea tale story would have a very different ending.

The Gospel also redirects the fearful in their evaluation (or priorities) with respect to threatened objects. In his treatment of anxiety over daily needs in the Sermon on the Mount (6:19-34), Jesus speaks to the anatomy of fear in at least two ways: he challenges his followers to seek God's kingdom rule as their highest priority (6:33; cf. 6:19-24), and he assures them of God's providential care as the means by which threats to their daily material needs will be adequately neutralized (6:25-32).¹⁵¹ Later, in the missionary discourse and addressing the threat posed by persecution to his people, Jesus assures them of God's provision of words when called to bear witness to authorities and persecutors (10:19). Continuing, he also implores his followers to value honoring God

¹⁵⁰ See Powlison, *Overcoming Anxiety*, 4.

¹⁵¹ See also Jones, *Why Worry*, 13-18.

and identification with Christ above the fleeting experience of momentary comfort that may come with yielding to the threats of persecutors (10:28-33). In his advocacy and warning, Jesus not only calls for a proper ordering of values, but he also distinguishes between true and false danger. In this scenario, the false eschatology of fear elevates the threat and consequences of persecution in this life. Alternatively, Jesus's true eschatology both warns about the consequences of denying him in this life (10:26-28, 33, 37-38) and instills hope through the promises of God's present and eternal care of his own (10:29-32, 39). Within the third discourse, Jesus warns about the cares or "worries" (*μέριμνα*) of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choking out the immeasurably more precious word of the kingdom (13:22).

In each of these ways, the biblical response to fear is to tell a better story, a truer story than that whispered (or shouted) by fear's eschatology.¹⁵² For biblical counselors, such "story replacement" operates as a prime goal of counseling: "to *rework the meanings* assigned to [counselees' storied experiences]. You seek to map the story of God's working onto the details of a life lived."¹⁵³ In other words, biblical counselors help their counselees view the story of themselves and their circumstances—including the perceived threats to things they value—as part of God's larger story of redemption.¹⁵⁴ In this way, biblical narrative—and all Scripture as a redemptive-historical narrative—is well-suited to help counselees respond faithfully to fear by offering a better story that advocates godly priorities and communicates comfort, hope, and promise into a world filled with fear-enticing threats.

¹⁵² Jeremy Pierre suggests counselors should offer their counselees a "better story" when interacting with counselees' storied interpretations of their experiences. Jeremy Pierre, "Marriage and Family Counseling" (lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, January 2019).

¹⁵³ David Powlison, "Illustrative Counseling," *JBC* 16, no. 2 (1998): 49. See also Tripp, *Instruments*, 184.

¹⁵⁴ Tripp, *Instruments*, 24-35.

Pastoral Care and Matthew 14:22-23

In addition to helping counselors understand and respond to fear, this passage has also informed my pastoral care on more than one occasion. “Shelby” sought help with personal anxieties and frustrations exacerbated by caring for her chronically-ill spouse. Specifically, Shelby was grieved over her occasional lack of compassion towards her spouse’s trials and concerned that periodic instances of anger might imply that she is not truly a Christian. At multiple levels, a thick understanding of Matthew 14:22-33 influenced my counsel to her. First, Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as the divine rescuer—both that theme’s steady beat of throughout the passage and especially his specific rescue of Peter—established an important beginning point for Shelby’s concerns: Jesus as the sole source and means of her salvation from sin. Shelby, like every follower of Christ, is imperfect, but her testimony, Christ-like fruit in her life, and her grief over indwelling sin all point to genuine trust in the saving work of Christ.

Second, Jesus’s confrontation of Peter proved instructive, specifically the indication that what Peter believed about Jesus was not, in Peter’s moment of panic, functioning as a control belief in his view of his world. During a conversation, Shelby expressed not only grief over her sin but frustration that she continued to experience moments of anger (though admittedly not to the degree and with the frequency that she previously experienced). Earlier in her life, Shelby achieved personal accomplishments that few have accomplished in their lives, and she attained these milestones through no small amount of hard work, self-denial, and self-determination. Shelby admitted that she felt frustrated. She thought that if she could accomplish such daunting milestones in her career, then she should, with the same resolve, be able to conquer a seemingly “small” thing like anger. In such moments, what Shelby believed about Jesus and sin was not operating as a control belief in her view of her experience. She was giving too much credit to her past accomplishments and too little credit to the depth of sin’s effects. We drew out the threat posed by sin as evidenced by the necessity of Jesus’s death (Gal

2:21). She admitted the disorder in her perspective and that only through the help that Christ provides could she battle against her experience of anger.

Third, we pivoted from a recognition of her need for Christ's help to going actively to Jesus for help. Peter's cry to Jesus for help prompted this consideration. Peter faltered on the sea, but his stumbling did not turn into an attempted self-rescue. Instead he pleaded to Christ for help. Also accounting for the disciples' climatic worship of Jesus, I encouraged Shelby to use the familiar ACTS acronym—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication—to guide her prayer in moments of conviction over instances of anger as well as moments of self-despair and frustration over what she perceived to be a lack of adequate (by her own evaluation) progress. As the disciples (and the whole passage) celebrates the greatness of Christ, I encouraged Shelby to recall in prayer the greatness of the triune God in her moments of conviction or self-frustration. Next, I encouraged her to confess her sin in prayer, and then to thank God for the rescue from sin and sin's effects he provides in Christ's death and resurrection. Lastly, I encouraged Shelby to ask—like Peter's plea for help—for Christ's help in responding to her spouse and his challenges with love and grace.

Fourth, our conversations brought out that her frustrations and anger over her husband's illness frequently focus on the ways his illness impacts and inconveniences her life. On the whole, Shelby is compassionate and caring towards her spouse. However, the illness has not only been hard for him but also hard for her, both in the attention and care she gives her spouse, as well as the hardship of seeing her spouse suffer. The disciples' viewed the mysterious figure on the water as a threat and potential hindrance, and Shelby often views the sickness as an obstacle. The illness is a trial for both of them, and with gentleness, we considered God's promises to use hardships to produce Christ-likeness in his children (Rom 8:28-30; Jas 1:2-4). For Shelby what is a hardship and obstacle for both her and her spouse is also one of God's providential means to produce growth after the image of his Son in both Shelby and her husband.

On another occasion, I preached a sermon from this text and drew out Jesus’s power and authority to calm stormy, unsettled hearts. In the midst of that emphasis, I used Jesus’s overnight coming through the storm and Peter’s plea for rescue to encourage those who face stretches of nighttime restlessness to look to Jesus in those periods for calm and rest of soul, even during the hard overnight hours when sleep seems impossible. Shortly after the sermon, “Josh”—who has found periods of sleeplessness to increase with advanced age—volunteered that this point of application was an encouragement for him to look to Christ through his Word for rest, rather than other forms of escape (e.g., television, internet, etc.) during his own periods of restlessness (cf. Ps 63:6; 119:55, 148). The sermon challenged him to consider how—in these times that can feel as if they may never end—the overwhelming desire for calmer thoughts and physical rest can easily drown out the reorienting awareness of Christ’s powerful presence at any time of day. He was bolstered by the way God’s Word could be faithfully used not simply as a general anesthetic to swab a broad (but unspecified) set of generic trials, but to strike more narrowly on a specific hardship he and others his age regularly face.

Conclusion

While a thick understanding of Matthew 14:22-33 is not essential to use that passage profitably in counseling others, a thicker understanding coupled with an intentional pursuit of the passage’s connections with counseling’s framework equips counselors to perceive multiple avenues by which this passage can beneficially inform how counselors understand fear—both in its makeup and responses to it—and provide counsel to others. By digging deeply into the Gospel of Matthew—its episodes, Jesus’s teaching, and its overarching narrative—counselors’ perspectives are further formed to counsel with wisdom and discernment, showing counselees God’s boundless provisions for them in the Lord Jesus, provisions to which Matthew authoritatively and inerrantly

bears witness through the theologically interpreted history of his Gospel.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ This chapter's primary focus has been confined to Matthew 14:22-33. Because of the necessarily constrained focus, other opportunities for additional study remain. Both Mark and John provide parallel accounts to the same historical event. It may prove worthwhile to consider each report separately and compare the potential counseling direction each evangelist provides through his unique recounting. See Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*. Moreover, the method presented in chapter 4 could be applied to separate passages across Matthew's Gospel to comprehend more thoroughly Matthew's counseling contributions. As a corollary, that examination of the Gospel's contents could be used to explore similarities between how individual episodes, Jesus's teaching, and the overarching narrative of the Gospel contribute to counseling. While this chapter interacts with multiple instances of Matthew's references to fear, each passage could be examined with chapter 4's strategy to comprehend more thoroughly nuances of Matthew's treatment of fear across his Gospel. Furthermore, a similar strategy could be employed for any topic Matthew addresses with special concern for how that topic informs the elements of counseling's overarching framework.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Biblical counselors are not homogenous, even where they share substantial common ground.¹ From the modern biblical counseling movement's earliest years, priorities and emphases have varied amongst modern biblical counseling's leaders.² However, these counselors have consistently been marked by a commitment—rooted in orthodox convictions about God's Word—to the primacy of Scripture to drive counseling's theory and practice. This commitment has routinely yielded multi-flavored and (sometimes) maturing fruit on topics and themes including what counseling is, the body of Christ as counseling's context, the guidance Scripture provides to the content of a counselor's counsel, the Bible's explanations of counselees and their concerns, and the hope, motivation, and change God's Word supplies for both counselors and those whom they counsel. Propelled by these shared but non-homogenized commitments, this thesis explores a consequence suggested by biblical counselors' convictions about the identity and value of Scripture for counseling: reading Scripture well equips counselors to counsel people well.

Providing responsible and necessary parental guidance to a developing adolescent, my dad frequently reminded teenage me that how I communicated was equally as important as what I communicated. In biblical counseling's development, the weight of attention to Scripture's drive of counseling has historically (and

¹ See 29n3.

² For example, see David Powlison's discussion on the unity and diversity in emphases and foci of Jay Adams, John Bettler, and John Broger during the first decade of biblical counseling's reemergence. David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 59-65.

understandably) been devoted to what Scripture communicates and how that content—whether through specific chapter and verse reference or in the translated form of doctrinal beliefs—addresses both hurting and wayward counselees as well as how counselors should approach counseling such counselees. However, biblical counseling’s robust commitment to the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture (and its doctrinal consequences) strongly suggests that counseling can further benefit from concerted attention to both how biblical genres uniquely communicate and how that unique communication influences the process by which counselors move from reading and understanding canonical literature to applying that literature in counseling. This thesis seeks to exert that concerted effort for the Gospel genre and specifically for the Gospel of Matthew.

The four canonical Gospels comprise a unique biblical genre that bears familial resemblances to antecedent literature such as OT historical narrative and Greco-Roman *βίοι*, and each contribution to the fourfold Gospel witness communicates a reliable, theologically interpreted history about Jesus that interweaves history, literature, and theology. Through his Gospel, Matthew combines brief episodes from Jesus’s life and ministry with portions of Jesus’s teaching into a carefully tailored overarching narrative. As counselors account for the evangelist’s communicative strategies, they are positioned to plumb the depths of Matthew’s richness for counseling by developing thick understandings of those passages and the Gospel through carefully, contextually, and holistically reading the Gospel’s constituent elements.

Drawing from the storehouse of Matthew’s Gospel for counseling begins with thick readings of individual passages, but counselors must necessarily move—either intuitively or through carefully formulated arguments—from the ancient world of Matthew’s text to present-day counseling concerns as they strive to help their counselees submit to the authority of God’s written Word. The three perspectives—normative, situational, and existential—of John Frame’s triperspectivalism provide a three-

dimensional framework for approaching biblical application as the intentional consideration of how Scripture's normative guidance provides situational and existential direction. Biblical application, approached in this three-dimensional fashion, couples seamlessly with counseling's three-trees framework and yields a three-fold strategy (captured by the acronym USE) for using a passage from the Gospel of Matthew in counseling: understand the passage's implications for application, seek how the passage connects to counseling's framework, and explore how the passage applies to a counselee. This method of translating from text to counseling context guides counselors to read passages in the Gospel thickly and to move from that reading to (1) how those passages address matters situationally and existentially, (2) the manifold ways passages attend to the concerns of counseling's framework, and (3) the ways passages apply to the specifics of counselees and their experiences.

Due to varying competencies in reading and interpretation, the fruit that results from this model will, in some measure, be influenced by a counselor's interpretive aptitude. Counselors with well-developed abilities in carefully, contextually, and holistically reading a Matthean text will fathom more thoroughly how the passage normatively speaks to circumstantial and experiential issues. However, irrespective of exegetical sophistication, counselors can utilize this three-fold approach to examine strategically and intentionally ways a passage maps onto the situational and existential dimensions of application and, consequently, addresses matters of concern for counselors and their counselees.

Matthew 14:22-23, Jesus's miraculous water-walking episode, helpfully demonstrates how careful, contextual, and holistic reading combined with attention to application's situational and existential dimensions offers valuable insights for counselors and their counselees. The disciples' and Peter's experiences of fear in this account—in conjunction with other observations from across the Gospel—aid counselors in dissecting fear and guiding their counselees in responding to their own experiences with fear.

Furthermore, by approaching accounts in Matthew's Gospel as described herein, counselors are not only better equipped to draw deeply and faithfully from their chosen passage, but they themselves are transformed by their engagement with Scripture such that as they read well, they are better equipped to counsel well.

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR MOVING FROM A MATTHEAN TEXT TO COUNSELING APPLICATION

Based on the presentation in chapter 4, the following sections provide sample questions for counselors as they seek to use the Gospel of Matthew in their counseling ministries.

Sample Questions for Understanding a Passage's Implications for Application

The questions provided in this section are only representative of the kinds of questions counselors can ask as they seek to discern the situational and existential concerns of a passage. Useful questions will frequently be shaped by the specific content and concerns of a passage. Moreover, rarely will all the questions apply to a single text. Just as the questions are not exhaustive, neither are they exclusive. Because of Matthew's style, the divisions between "episode" and "Jesus's teaching" are not rigid, thus questions from both literary divisions sometimes apply to the same passage.

Situational

1. **Episode:** What types of situations are the characters, including Jesus, confronted with? How is Jesus's relationship to those circumstances presented? How is Jesus portrayed in this passage? What do others say or imply about Jesus, including his relationship to God, the kingdom, and creation? What does this passage suggest about God's involvement in the world? What relationships are addressed or modeled (positively or negatively) in this passage?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What types of situations does Jesus address? What does Jesus

say about past, present, and future circumstances? What does Jesus say or imply about himself, including his relationship to God, the kingdom, and creation? What does he say about God and God's involvement in the world? What other theological instruction does Jesus provide (e.g., anthropology, hamartiology, etc.)? What commands, warnings, promises, etc. does Jesus issue in this passage, and what situational truths do these statements convey? What does Jesus say about relationships in this passage?

3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** How are these circumstances, themes, and ideas presented and treated elsewhere in the Gospel? How do those other treatments help you grasp the situations and truths addressed in the focal passage?

Existential

1. **Narrative:** How do Jesus and other characters respond (i.e., words, actions, and emotions) to their circumstances? What is stated or implied about the characters' internal responses (thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, choices)? What is stated or implied about the characters' dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires, and commitments)? What values and priorities are presented positively and negatively? What does the passage state or imply about following Jesus? How is Matthew leading readers to respond to Jesus, this scene, and its characters?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What types of responses (expressed or internal) does Jesus address, and what does he say or imply about these responses? What heart functions does Jesus address, and what does he say or imply about these functions? What values and priorities does Jesus advocate or oppose? What does Jesus say about following him? What commands, warnings, promises, etc. does Jesus issue in this passage, and what would seem to be God-honoring and wise responses to these statements? How does Jesus invite or implore his hearers to respond?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** How are these responses, themes, and ideas presented and treated elsewhere in the Gospel? How do those other treatments help you grasp the existential direction provided in the focal passage?

Sample Questions for Seeking a Passage's Connections to Counseling's Framework

The following questions are neither exhaustive in their content nor exclusive in their divisions. As with the "Understand" questions, the "Seek" questions do not exhaust the possible questions that a counselor could profitably use to discern a passage's guidance to counseling. Frequently questions and follow up questions will necessarily be shaped by the specific content and concerns of a passage. Moreover, not every question will be answerable by every text, nor will every text necessarily connect to each aspect of the framework. As with the "Understand" questions, the divisions in the questions do not

indicate exclusivity. Questions from both literary divisions sometime apply to the same passage. Furthermore, in accordance with application's creativity, counselors should seek to locate both primary ways the text explicitly addresses good roots and fruit as well as secondary ways the text anticipates the same by considering potential roots and fruits that would be the opposite of bad roots and fruit directly addressed by the text.

Heat

1. **Narrative:** What circumstances—hardship or blessing, real or perceived—are these characters experiencing? Which types of suffering confront characters in this passage? Suffering from general life hardships (e.g., bereavement, natural disasters, economic downturns)? From being sinned against by others (e.g., rejection, abuse, assault, gossip)? From bodily problems (chronic or acute; minor or severe; including brain injuries/disorders)? From demonic attacks? From ungodly counsel, false teaching, and worldly cultural influences? What does Matthew state or imply about these circumstances?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What circumstances does Jesus address or illustrate in this portion of his teaching? Which types of suffering does Jesus address? What does Jesus say or imply about those circumstances?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For circumstances or hardships addressed in this passage, how are these topics presented and treated elsewhere in the Gospel? How do those other treatments help you grasp what Matthew communicates about these forms of heat in the focal passage?

Bad Fruit

1. **Narrative:** What sinful or unwise expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) do characters exhibit in this passage? What sinful or unwise internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) do characters possess in this passage? How are characters sinfully or unwisely responding to Jesus? What does the passage state or imply about the relationship between these responses and the characters' circumstances?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What sinful or unwise responses (expressed or internal) does Jesus address or illustrate in this portion of his teaching? What does Jesus say or imply about these responses? What warnings or judgements does Jesus express in relation to these responses? What does Jesus say or imply about the relationship between these responses and circumstances?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For sinful or unwise responses addressed in this passage, how does Matthew also address these responses elsewhere in his Gospel? How does Matthew's treatment of these responses elsewhere help you understand more fully what he communicates about these responses in the focal passage?

Bad Roots

1. **Narrative:** What is stated or implied about characters' sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities)? What does Matthew state or imply about the relationship between these heart functions, sinful or unwise responses (internal or expressed), and circumstances?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions (including values and priorities) does Jesus address in this passage? What does Jesus say or imply about these heart functions? What warnings or judgements does Jesus express in relation to these heart functions? What does Jesus state or imply about the relationship between these heart functions, sinful or unwise responses, and circumstances?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions addressed in this passage, how does Matthew also address these functions elsewhere in his Gospel? How does Matthew's treatment of these heart functions elsewhere help you understand more fully what he communicates about these functions in the focal passage?

Cross: God in His Redemptive Glory and Love

1. **Narrative:** What is stated or implied in this story about God and his redemptive glory and love, especially in the person and work of Jesus? What other divinely provided provisions for change appear in this passage? How does the narrative present God and his glory and love (especially in Christ) in relation to the characters' circumstances, their expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions), internal responses (thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices), and dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities)? How does the narrative present God and his provisions as transforming sinful or unwise responses and heart functions? How does the narrative present these provisions as motivating God-honoring and wise heart functions and responses?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What about God and his redemptive glory and love, especially in the person and work of Jesus, does Jesus address in this portion of this teaching? What other divinely provided provisions does Jesus address in this passage? What promises does Jesus convey? What reasons does Jesus give for hope? What does Jesus say or imply about God and his glory and love in relation to circumstances, dynamic heart functions, and responses? How does Jesus indicate or imply that God and his provisions transform sinful or unwise responses and heart functions? How does Jesus present these provisions as motivating God-honoring and wise heart functions and responses?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For Matthew's treatment of God and his redemptive glory and love (especially in the person and work of Jesus) addressed by Matthew in this passage, how does Matthew address these same topics elsewhere in the Gospel? How do those other treatments help you grasp what Matthew communicates about these provisions in the focal passage?

Good Roots (Textual, Primary)

1. **Narrative:** What is stated or implied about exemplary characters—Jesus and secondary characters—and their God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities)? What does the narrative state or imply about the relationship between these heart functions, and God's provisions?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions does Jesus address in this passage? What does Jesus say or imply about these heart functions? What promises or inducements does Jesus express in relation to these heart functions? What does Jesus say or imply about the relationship between these heart functions and God's provisions?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions addressed by Matthew in this passage, how does he also address these functions elsewhere in his Gospel? How do those other treatments help you grasp what Matthew communicates about these provisions in the focal passage?

Good Roots (Supplemental, Secondary)

1. **Narrative:** If the narrative indicates or implies characters' sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities), are there contrasting God-honoring and wise heart functions present in the story? If so, where? If not, what would be opposite God-honoring and wise heart functions? How might the characters respond differently if those God-honoring and wise heart functions were present?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** For sinful or unwise heart functions addressed by Jesus, does Jesus contrast those heart functions with God-honoring and wise heart functions? If yes, what are those opposite functions? If not, what would be opposite God-honoring and wise heart functions?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For sinful or unwise heart functions addressed in this passage, what contrasting God-honoring and wise heart functions does Matthew address elsewhere in his Gospel? How do those treatments help you better understand what he says about sinful and unwise heart functions in the focal passage?

Good Fruit (Textual, Primary)

1. **Narrative:** What God-honoring and wise expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) do Jesus and secondary characters exhibit in this passage? What God-honoring and wise internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) do characters possess in this passage? How are characters faithfully and wisely responding to Jesus? What does this passage state or imply about the relationship between these responses, God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires and values, as well as commitments and priorities), God's provisions, and circumstances?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** What God-honoring and wise expressed or internal responses does Jesus address or illustrate in this portion of his teaching? What does Jesus say

or imply about these responses? What promises or inducements does Jesus express in relation to these responses? What does Jesus say or imply about the relationship between these responses, God-honoring and wise heart functions, God's provisions, and circumstances?

3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For God-honoring and wise responses (expressed or internal) addressed in this passage, how else does Matthew address similar responses elsewhere in his Gospel? How do these treatments help you better understand what he says about these responses in the focal passage?

Good Fruit (Supplemental, Secondary)

1. **Narrative:** If characters express sinful or unwise responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions), are there contrasting God-honoring and wise responses present in the story? If so, where? If the narrative describes or implies that characters possess internal sinful or unwise responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices), are there contrasting God-honoring and wise responses present in the story? If so, where? If contrasting responses (either expressed or internal) are not present, what would be opposite God-honoring and wise heart responses?
2. **Jesus's Teaching:** For sinful or unwise responses (expressed or internal) addressed by Jesus, does Jesus contrast those responses with God-honoring and wise responses? If yes, what are those opposite responses and what does Jesus say about them? If not, what would be opposite God-honoring and wise heart functions?
3. **Whole Gospel Connections:** For sinful or unwise responses addressed in this passage, what contrasting God-honoring and wise responses does Matthew address elsewhere in his Gospel? How do those treatments help you better understand what he says about sinful or unwise responses in the focal passage?

Sample Questions for Exploring How a Passage Applies to a Counselee

The sample "exploration" questions below are suggestive of the kinds of questions counselors can utilize to explore how a passage in Matthew's Gospel applies to a counselee's circumstance and experiences. As with the questions in the previous section, these example questions are by no means exhaustive of the queries counselors can or should answer when combining text and specifics. Other questions will arise from both the passage's details as well as the specifics of the counseling situation being addressed. These questions are also grouped according to the divisions of counseling's framework. However, questions are not further subdivided according to Matthew's literary forms since the focus on this stage is relating the passage's normative guidance

(irrespective of form) identified in previous steps to the counselee's situation and experience. However, questions are provided not only to assist counselors in addressing bad roots previously confirmed to be present but also to guide counselors in hypothesizing potential bad roots based on the presence of bad fruit in a counselee's life. Furthermore, questions are provided not only to assist counselors in responding to good roots and fruit previously confirmed but also to envision potential good roots and fruit for counselees to pursue.

Heat

1. What are the similarities and differences between your counselee's circumstances—hardship or blessing, real or perceived—and those addressed in this passage and Gospel? Do these categories of suffering help identify areas of overlap: suffering from general life hardships; being sinned against by others; bodily problems; demonic attacks; ungodly counsel, false teaching, or worldly cultural influences?
2. How does Matthew's treatment of these circumstances in this passage help you understand and guide your counselee?

Bad Fruit (Confirmed)

1. How are your counselee's sinful or unwise expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) both similar to and different from responses in this passage? How are your counselee's sinful or unwise internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) both similar to and different from responses in this passage?
2. In what ways do your counselee's sinful or unwise responses (expressed or internal) contrast with God-honoring and wise responses addressed in this passage?
3. How does Matthew's treatment of these sinful or unwise responses help you understand and guide your counselee?
4. How can you use this passage to help your counselee address these sinful or unwise responses faithfully?

Bad Roots (Hypothesized)

1. Consider similarities and differences between your counselee's sinful or unwise expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) and sinful or unwise expressed responses in the passage. Also consider similarities and differences between your counselee's sinful or unwise internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) and sinful or unwise internal responses in the passage. How does the passage's

association of sinful and unwise responses and sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments and priorities) shed light on what sinful or unwise dynamic heart functions may be temptations for your counselee?

2. What other connections between circumstances, responses, and heart functions in this passage suggest possible temptations for your counselee?
3. How can you use this passage to explore these issues with your counselee?

Bad Roots (Confirmed)

1. What sinful or unwise heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments or priorities) addressed in this passage have been identified in your counselee?
2. In what ways do your counselee's sinful or unwise heart functions contrast with God-honoring and wise heart functions addressed in this passage?
3. How does the treatment of those heart functions in this passage guide you in counseling your counselee?
4. How can you use this passage to help your counselee see or understand the presence and consequence of these heart functions?

God in His Redemptive Glory and Love

1. How might Matthew's presentation of God and his redemptive glory and love—especially in the person and work of Jesus—in this passage fuel and guide your counselee's pursuit of change of sinful or unwise heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments or priorities), internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices), and expressed responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions)?
2. How does the treatment of God and his redemptive glory and love in this passage guide you in counseling your counselee?
3. How does this passage's treatment of other divinely provided provisions for change guide you in counseling your counselee?
4. How can you use this passage to help your counselee feed on God and his redemptive glory and love?

Good Roots (Confirmed)

1. What God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments or priorities) addressed in this passage also seem to be present in your counselee?
2. In what ways do your counselee's God-honoring and wise heart functions contrast with sinful or unwise heart functions addressed in this passage and Gospel?

3. How can you use this passage's treatment of beliefs, desires, values, commitments, and priorities to encourage your counselee?

Good Roots (Envisioned)

1. What God-honoring and wise dynamic heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments or priorities) present in this passage does your counselee need to cultivate?
2. How does the treatment of these heart functions in this passage guide you in counseling your counselee?
3. How can you use this passage in conjunction with other divinely-given provisions to help your counselee cultivate these heart functions?

Good Fruit (Confirmed)

1. What God-honoring and wise external responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) or internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) addressed in this passage also seem to be present in your counselee?
2. In what ways do your counselee's God-honoring and wise responses contrast with sinful or unwise responses addressed in this passage and Gospel?
3. How can you use this passage to encourage your counselee?

Good Fruit (Envisioned)

1. What God-honoring and wise external responses (i.e., words, actions, and expressed emotions) or internal responses (i.e., thoughts or interpretations, feelings or internalized emotions, and choices) addressed in this passage does your counselee need to cultivate?
2. How does the treatment of these responses in this passage guide you in counseling your counselee?
3. How can you use this passage in conjunction with other divinely-given provisions to help your counselee cultivate heart functions (i.e., beliefs, desires or values, and commitments or priorities) that will lead to these responses?

APPENDIX 2

MATTHEW'S USE OF NT VOCABULARY FOR FEAR

Matthew uses two word groups to refer to the disciples' fear in Matthew 14:22-33: φοβέω and a cognate appear three times (φοβέω at 14:27, 30; and φόβος at 14:26), and ταρασσώ is used once (14:26). The NT is not short on vocabulary for the experience of worry, anxiety, and fear, as suggested by LN's two domains for fear and worry (with forty-seven entries for forty-nine unique NT words and phrases).¹ Matthew's uses of words listed in those domains are provided in tables A1 and A2 below. Matthew uses twelve words a total of thirty-nine times (in thirty-five verses) with meanings inside those two domains (see table A1). He also uses six of the forty-nine words (eleven times in nine verses) with meanings outside LN's fear and worry domains (see table A2). Only σείω ("shake" or "tremble") occurs in both lists. Of the words Matthew uses for fear, two word groups predominate in the Gospel: twenty-one instances (in nineteen verses) of the φοβέω group and nine instances (in eight verses) of the μεριμνάω group. From both groups, Matthew prefers verbs (φοβέω/φοβέομαι—18x, μεριμνάω—7x) significantly more often than the cognate nouns and adjective (φόβος—3x, μέριμνα and ἀμέριμνος—1x each). This preference likely stems from the narrative nature of the Gospel, but it may also suggest that Matthew approaches fear primarily as an action or response rather than

¹ In their *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (LN), J. P. Louw and Eugene Nida include forty-seven entries in two subdomains—25.U "Worry, Anxiety, Distress, Peace" and 25.V "Fear, Terror, Alarm"—that encompass the concepts of worry, anxiety, and fear (LN, 1:312-17). In these two subdomains, thirty-two words and phrases only have entries in these two subdomains. Of the remaining words, these two domains contain the primary lexical entries for six words, eleven words have secondary entries (one word [φόβος] appears with both primary and secondary entries) in the domains, and one word (ἀσθένεια) has a tertiary entry. The observations in this appendix derive from a review of the LN entries, the occurrences in Matthew of the forty-nine unique words and phrases in the domains, and the lexical entries in BDAG.

Table A1. Matthean words whose usage lies within LN subdomains 25U and 25V

Word Group	Word ²	LN Entry	Instances in Matthew in LN 25U and 25V	
	ἀδημονέω	ἀδημονέω	25.247	26:37
	δειλός	δειλός	25.268	8:26
	θορυβέω	θορυβέομαι (θορυβέω)	25.234	9:23
	θροέω	θροέομαι (θροέω)	25.262	24:6
	μέλει	μέλει	25.223	22:16
μεριμνάω	μέριμνα	25.224	13:22	
	μεριμνάω	25.225	6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34 (x2); 10:19 ³	
	ἀμέριμνος	25.226	28:14 ³	
	σείω	σείω	25.233	21:10 ³ ; 28:4 ³
	ταράσσω	ταράσσω	25.244	2:3; 14:26
φοβέω	φόβος	25.251	14:26; 28:4, 8	
	φοβέομαι (φοβέω)	25.252	1:20; 2:22; 9:8; 10:26, 28 (x2) ³ , 31; 14:5, 27, 30; 17:6 ³ , 7; 21:26, 46; 25:25, 27:54; 28:5, 10	

as a state or condition.⁴ Matthew addresses fear in both narrative and discursive contexts, and over half (twenty) of the occurrences of fear words are clustered in four passages.

² For entries with passive and active forms, LN uses the passive form as the lexical entry in subdomains 25U and V. The active form (in parentheses) is the lexical entry in the other LN subdomains listed and in BDAG.

³ These instances appear in the LN entry indicated. All other entry correspondences in this table were established based on the LN definition, BDAG definition, and the context of the occurrence in Matthew.

⁴ Matthew's proclivity for these verbs mirrors the other Gospels. Whereas Matthew's ratio of verbs to other cognates in the φοβέω group is 18:3, the ratio in Mark is 12:2; Luke-Acts is 37:18, and John is 5:3. The rest of the NT (largely epistolary literature) has a ratio of 24:26. Verbs in the μεριμνάω word group are preferred throughout the NT: Matthew's ratio of verb to other cognates is 7:2, the ratio in Mark is 1:1; Luke-Acts is 5:2, and 7:3 in the rest of the NT (with no occurrences of the group in John's Gospel).

Table A2. Matthean words within LN subdomains 25U and 25V whose usage lies outside those domains

Word Group	Word ⁵	LN Entry	Instances in Matthew not in LN 25U and 25V
προσδοκάω	προσδοκάω	30.55	11:3; 24:50
σείω	σείω	16.7	27:51
συνέχω	συνέχομαι (συνέχω)	90.65	4:24 ⁶
σαλεύω	σαλεύομαι (σαλεύω)	16.7	11:7; 24:29
ειρήνη	ειρήνη	22.42	10:13 (x2), 34 (x2)
ἀσθένεια	ἀσθένεια	23.143	8:17

Two of the five discourses each contain a dense occasion of these terms: the Sermon on the Mount (6:25-34—6x), and the missionary discourse (10:19, 26-31—5x). Two narratives also possess a higher-than-normal concentration of the fear words: the account considered in chapter 5 (14:26-30—4x), and the resurrection (28:4-10—5x). The linguistics suggest that the experience of fear is more than an incidental topic for Matthew.

⁵ See note 3 above.

⁶ See note 4 above.

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ABSTRACT

READING THE GOSPELS WELL TO COUNSEL PEOPLE WELL: HERMENEUTICS, BIBLICAL COUNSELING, AND THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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This project unites hermeneutics, biblical studies, and biblical counseling to propose an approach for faithfully reading passages in the Gospel of Matthew in an effort to counsel with wisdom and discernment.

Chapter 1 overviews the abundance of literature at readers' (including counselors') disposal in the fields of hermeneutics and biblical studies, including treatments specifically devoted to Gospel studies and Matthew's Gospel. A library of resources has continued to develop over the past fifty years to relaunch, clarify, and advance biblical counseling, as well as materials to train and grow counselors. Some authors strive to teach counselors about the process of moving from the biblical text to counseling concerns (and vice versa). However, a void remains in considering the impact of literary genre on the translation from God's inerrant Word to a counselee's experience.

Chapter 2 surveys the doctrinal commitments undergirding biblical counselors' conviction that Scripture drives counseling and summarizes the multiple ways the Bible directs and motivates counseling. As counselors read, understand, and apply the Scriptures, God's Word actively leads counselors in establishing counseling's theory and practice as well as guiding how they address their counselees and their concerns.

Chapter 3 then approaches how Matthew's Gospel informs counseling based on what the Gospel contains and how the evangelist communicates to his readers through

episodes, Jesus's teaching, and the book's overarching narrative. In light of the Gospel's contents and communicative methods, the chapter concludes with a method to read and understand a Matthean passage by close examination of the text, consideration of the passage's context, and holistic evaluation of the passage's historical and theological communication.

Chapter 4 discusses the application of Matthew's Gospel in counseling by first identifying characteristics of faithful biblical application. Drawing from John Frame's triperspectivalism, the treatment then describes wise and discerning application as the recognition of how Scripture's normative perspective provides readers with situational and existential guidance. Finally, using the USE acronym, the chapter offers a three-fold method to apply the Gospel of Matthew in counseling by first understanding the passage, then seeking how the passage connects with counseling's theological framework, and finally exploring how the passage speaks to counselees and their concerns.

Chapter 5 then applies the three-fold method to Matthew 14:22-33, observing how that passage helps detail the anatomy of fear and furnishes guidance for responding to fear. The chapter closes with two examples of that pericope's application in my own pastoral counseling and ministry.

Chapter 6 provides concluding and summary remarks.

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PUBLICATIONS

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