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TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS OF THE AUBURN,  
ALABAMA, COMMUNITY IN BIBLICAL  
COUNSELING THROUGH THE  
OWEN CENTER

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

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

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by  
Braden Manning Benson  
December 2024

**APPROVAL SHEET**

TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS OF THE AUBURN,  
ALABAMA, COMMUNITY IN BIBLICAL  
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OWEN CENTER

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For the glory of God

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## PREFACE

This project simply would not have happened without the grace of God. Praise be to him, that this work might be honoring and useful to the expansion of his Kingdom. Thank you to my long-suffering wife, Victoria, who supported me from start to finish throughout this doctorate. Thank you to my children—Lewis, Phoebe, Theodore, and Margot. It is my hope that one day the Lord calls you into the service of ministry so that we may all participate in the work of his Kingdom. Also thank you to Dr. Solomon who endured the brunt of many first drafts and unanswerable questions. It has been an honor to work with you in this project.

Braden Benson

Auburn, Alabama

December 2024

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The more you know Christ, the more you trust him. The more you trust Christ, the more you follow him. The more you follow Christ, the more you look like him. The more you look like Christ, the more you revel in his presence. This is the aim of The Owen Center, a biblical counseling ministry that desires to bring gospel-centered biblical counseling to the cities of Opelika and Auburn, Alabama. The center focuses primarily on encouraging counselees toward more deeply knowing, trusting, and following Jesus in every aspect of their lives, especially in their darkest and most challenging moments. Writing as a biblical counselor at The Owen Center, the focus of this project was to build a curriculum designed to train pastors and church leaders in the basics of biblical counseling.

The counselors of The Owen Center firmly believe that one cannot achieve complete heart transformation and healing from secular therapy alone, for therapeutic practices only aim at management of suffering. There might be observable behavioral and emotional change through certain psychological approaches, but true transformation of the heart only comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. This heart change is displayed in Ezekiel 36:26 where God says “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Therefore, the goal is to help all people experience how the Spirit works through the Word of God in producing this heart change. The Owen Center believes that the church should be the main venue for this change to take place, being that many references

to the church in Scripture have soul care as the primary goal.<sup>1</sup> Also, it is common for Master of Divinity programs to only require one counseling class to graduate. Thus, educating and training pastors and church leaders in soul care is the next step in the philosophy of ministry of The Owen Center.

### **Context**

Founded in 2014, The Owen Center initially focused on establishing an identity and trust with the local churches by counseling individuals, marriages, and families by appointment and referrals. This trust has been evidenced by a nearly insurmountable waiting list and new referrals every day. The Owen Center has now progressed to implementing and developing a teaching presence in the community. This plan includes providing seminars on personal struggles, family, and community renewal through Sunday school series, mini-series, and further involvement with local churches and seminaries. This phase also includes building a network of local pastors who support biblical counseling. The aim is to train church leaders in practical counseling skills to avoid the tendency to refer church members to outside resources due to feelings of inadequacy. Eventually, The Owen Center would like to see this grow into a larger community network of support groups for addiction, grief, and disorders while also enriching local church leaders.

The need for community counseling education is found in the reception of The Owen Center ministry and the systemic growth experienced purely by word-of-mouth advertising. The focus has been meeting with pastors one-on-one to discuss issues they most commonly see within their church congregations. Through speaking with pastors of the congregations that The Owen Center serves most, several trends were observed that give an idea of where to start with training. It is a grace that many of the local pastors are

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<sup>1</sup> See Galatians 6:1–2; Ephesians 4:16; 1 Peter 5:1–4.

somewhat familiar with and open to biblical counseling. That said, after meeting with the pastoral staffs of our church partners, every one of them expressed a need for further training in biblical counseling.<sup>2</sup>

Although the idea of biblical counseling is well-received by the local church partners and counselees, biblical counseling as a practice is relatively unknown and nonexistent within most of the local churches in the Auburn area. Pastors will meet with their congregants for minor needs, but pastors often outsource anything that might exceed a few hours of counseling. There are many licensed professional counselors (LPCs), psychiatrists, and life coaches in Auburn, but The Owen Center is the only brick-and-mortar office that offers counseling from a biblical perspective. Other biblical counselors in the Southeast Alabama region offer online counseling, but one of the main focuses of The Owen Center is to provide in-person counseling to those who are willing to come. Even though online counseling is always an option, The Owen Center stands out in the Auburn area, aside from the church, as one of the few places people can come sit in an office to receive biblical counsel and discuss problems in a safe Christian context.

Investigating further into our local church context, The Owen Center found that the most common problems pastors face within their church are loneliness, parenting, assurance of salvation, anxiety, guilt, shame, conflict resolution, and marital issues.<sup>3</sup> These observations are fascinating because most of the counseling cases The Owen Center facilitates for congregants from these churches deal with subjects that their pastor did not mention, including sexuality issues, sexual abuse, addiction, depression, suicidal

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<sup>2</sup> Owen Center church partners are churches that have committed to financially support The Owen Center on an annual basis. By committing to support The Owen Center, these churches become the primary focus in our provision of biblical counseling, helping us to further our reach to those who might not be able to afford conventional counseling.

<sup>3</sup> These observations were gathered through a brief survey from The Owen Center previously given out to local pastors before the beginning of this project.

thoughts, and self-harming behaviors (eating disorders, cutting, drug abuse).<sup>4</sup> Through this information, one could surmise a particular divide in what someone feels comfortable telling a counselor at a counseling center not attached to their church versus what they feel comfortable revealing to their pastor. This is a problem The Owen Center desires to change through this project by helping the churches be better equipped to handle more complex issues and for the congregations of these churches to have more confidence in their pastors' abilities to give wise and loving counsel to them no matter the problem.

The problem found in the Auburn community is that pastors are likely to refer congregants to outside therapy with little knowledge of the therapist or approach they will take with the member in need. It is unclear whether this is due to the pastor's busy schedule, the inability to provide counsel because of skill, or some other reason, but this is another problem that will be addressed through this project. The Owen Center's mission is always to strive to encourage pastors and their ministry staff in counseling pursuits and education within their ministry context. There are many strengths found in each church, but also where there might be weaknesses or abdication of the role of counseling and soul care. The primary focus of The Owen Center is not to replace the local church's counseling mission but simply to help establish it. When this is accomplished, there will no longer be an unhealthy dependence on resources outside of the church to provide the core of counseling ministry.

To address these problems, this project will consist of developing a multi-faceted curriculum to offer a variety of topics for churches to choose from and then be able to teach that material adequately via this project. This would not necessarily make The Owen Center obsolete but instead, would allow the ability to focus on the more

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<sup>4</sup> The Owen Center requires a personal profile to be completed before each counselee enters the office for the first appointment. The information taken from the profile includes the church where the counselee attends, so we are able to track what issues we see from certain churches. This information is all confidential and not shared with the church unless a certain situation requires us to break confidentiality according to our agreement.

complex and challenging cases, education, planting new counseling centers, and growing the ministry of biblical counseling throughout the Southeast.

### **Rationale**

The Owen Center holds a very high view of the church and therefore also holds a very high view of counseling care's place in the church's ministry. Gregory of Nazianzus challenged the common approach to vocational pastoral care when he wrote that the minister's role is the "diagnosis and cure of our habits, passions, lives, wills, and whatever else is within us, by banishing from our compound nature everything brutal and fierce, and introducing and establishing in their stead what is gentle and dear to God, and arbitrating fairly between soul and body."<sup>5</sup> The Owen Center stands firm in the belief that soul care should be done through the ministry of biblical counseling within the church. The Owen Center understands that biblical counseling is a personal application of the ministry of God's Word through the work of the Holy Spirit. This belief cultivates the idea of counseling as the application of the sermon on Sunday mornings. Without counseling of any kind, the church members are left to themselves to sort out and apply whatever they learned from the sermon.

Theologically, The Owen Center operates from 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which states, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."<sup>6</sup> Paul's words to Timothy establish a confidence in the reader that God's Word is sufficient, but what about the problems that may not be explicitly listed in Scripture? This can leave a large void in connecting congregants' daily lives and suffering to Scripture—this is where biblical counseling can help. Though

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations* 2.18 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 7:208–9).

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

The Owen Center does not see counseling as a higher authority than the preaching of God's Word, relational ministry (as Gregory of Nazianzus points out) is an essential support beam that holds up the authority and efficacy of the sermon preached every week by further applying the Word of God to people's daily lives.

Therefore, the rationale of this project was to first and foremost support and encourage pastors and ministry leaders by helping the church fulfill its calling to the people they serve. The Owen Center seeks to bolster the skill of the applying God's Word to all problems found within the human experience by enabling pastors and ministry leaders to be the main component of counseling congregants. The Owen Center believes that this is to be done by educating pastors and ministry leaders in the process of biblical counseling. This happens when the Holy Spirit uses his servants as the means of his grace and edification of others. If nothing changes in the current church community, the theme of churches outsourcing their counseling to biblical counselors at The Owen Center or secular therapists will likely continue. This problem may potentially cause people of the Auburn area to only see the church as a place of worship on Sunday morning, but not a place to take their real issues when faced with the brokenness of this world.

### **Purpose**

This project aimed to train pastors, ministry leaders, and Christians of the Auburn, Alabama, community in the basic principles and application of biblical counseling through the means of The Owen Center.

### **Goals**

For this project to have been cohesive and achievable, the following goals were applied to the execution of training pastors, ministry leaders, and Christians interested in lay counseling in Auburn, Alabama. The focus of the goals began with identifying the target audience, followed by implementing biblical counseling training for the local church body.

1. The first goal was to identify three to five churches that would benefit from this project and assess their knowledge and awareness of the benefits of biblical counseling.
2. The second goal was to develop and facilitate an introductory training course designed to raise the awareness of biblical counseling for pastors and Christians in our community.
3. The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the training in its ability to raise awareness and execution of basic principles of biblical counseling and each church's application of the training.

The hope upon completing these goals was that the church community of Auburn would have a higher view of biblical counseling and the participating churches would have a deeper understanding of caring for difficult counseling situations among their congregations. Thus, the main intention of the goals was to help people understand how God's holy Word applies to their everyday lives and the brokenness of the world. Throughout the next section, the methodology of each goal will be described.<sup>7</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

The success of this project depended on the execution and fruition of these proposed goals. The first goal was to identify the target audience(s). This goal called for identifying three to five churches local to the Auburn area that may benefit from the project's aim. The Owen Center already had twelve churches partnered financially. Therefore, it made the most sense to offer the training to those twelve churches. After identifying these churches, the class was advertised and opened to any who wanted to attend. The first goal was completed after at least three specific churches agreed to participate in the project and their needs were appropriately identified and understood.

The second goal was to develop and facilitate an interchangeable biblical counseling training course for the participating churches. Utilizing the information gathered from the first goal, there was some personalization and adjustment of the

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<sup>7</sup> All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.



curriculum. The Owen Center already has an introductory curriculum to work from with the beginning course that was adapted into five two-hour sessions that would be taught over five weeks.<sup>8</sup> This curriculum was reviewed by a panel of experts before the training began.<sup>9</sup> This panel used a provided rubric for their evaluation of the curriculum to validate that the curriculum was biblical, understandable, and adaptable to the context of a church training. The rubric can be found in appendix 2. The experts recommended a few minor alterations to the curriculum, but after those changes were implemented, the program was approved by the panel. This goal was then considered completed after The Owen Center developed the curriculum, presented it to the panel, the panel approved the curriculum, and the participants were willing to move forward with the training.

The third goal was to examine and determine the efficacy of the training once the curriculum was completed. At the end of the five two-hour sessions, another survey examined the growth of knowledge and interest in learning more about biblical counseling. This was the “Biblical Counseling Assessment Post-Survey.” This survey can be found in appendix 4. The post-survey included the same initial questions as the pre-survey, but included different qualitative questions to further assess the growth of the attendees. Due to the project focusing on one consistent group being taught the material over five weeks, a paired t-test was sufficient for the comparison between the results of the pre-survey and post-survey to find significance. The t-test results can be found in Appendix 5.

The post-survey also had a secondary purpose: identifying specific individuals who want to pursue further education in biblical counseling through The Owen Center. These individuals will be called Counseling Advocates. This will help The Owen Center

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<sup>8</sup> There were technically ten one-hour lessons in all, but two lessons were taught per meeting, thus only resulting in five two-hour meetings altogether.

<sup>9</sup> The panel of experts included Dr. John Kwasny, Dr. Joseph Hussung, Dr. Howard Eyrich, Dr. Gary Spooner, and Dr. Jim Newheiser.

strengthen its relationships with the participating churches. For example, if someone in the Counseling Advocate's church congregation is undergoing biblical counseling via The Owen Center, The Owen Center counselors have a direct contact to help the individual get more accountability within the church and ultimately transition the counselee from the counseling office back into the church body. This goal will be considered complete when The Owen Center has at least one Counseling Advocate in each church participating in the project.

The Owen Center hopes that this was the first of many courses that the center is invited to teach to church staff, with each following course focusing on different counseling topics, ranging from specific to broader issues facing the church.

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

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

*Biblical counseling.* Biblical counseling is a ministry of the Word of God focused on applying practical theology to the daily lives of people in a Christlike, interpersonal, and relational way. The Owen Center defines biblical counseling as the biblically based, theologically robust, and Spirit-led implementation of the work of Jesus Christ in a person's life. Biblical counseling is more than problem-solving, for it is not problem-centered or person-centered, but Christ-centered.<sup>10</sup> "Biblical counseling is *biblical*," state Robert Jones, Kristin Kellen, and Rob Green, seeing that it "seeks to do nothing more or less than intentionally, consistently apply historic, orthodox, evangelical Christian truth to the realm of personal ministry and human problems."<sup>11</sup> Throughout the past fifty years, there have been both helpful and hurtful approaches to biblical counseling, so this definition is not inclusive of all approaches to biblical counseling.

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<sup>10</sup> Bob Kellemen and Kevin Carson, eds., *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Counseling* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 11.

This describes the motive of seeing Scripture as the main source of truth and life in dealing with counseling issues. The Biblical Counseling Coalition gives a thorough and helpful definition of biblical counseling in their confessional statement:

Biblical counseling occurs whenever and wherever God’s people engage in conversations that are anchored in Scripture, centered on Christ and the Gospel, grounded in sound theology, dependent upon the Holy Spirit and prayer, directed toward sanctification, rooted in the life of the church, founded in love, attentive to heart issues, comprehensive in understanding, thorough in care, practical and relevant, and oriented toward outreach.<sup>12</sup>

*Integrationist counseling.* Integrationist counseling deals with a large group of counselors and therapists who seek to integrate modern psychotherapeutic models with biblical truth. Stanton Jones and Richard Butman—two thought leaders in the integrationist model—state that the balanced integrationist view only follows the tradition of building beyond the basic structure of the fundamental truths of Scripture to answer questions that are only tangentially addressed in the Bible.<sup>13</sup> Just as biblical counseling has helpful and hurtful schools of thought, the same goes for the integrationist. Professor of Psychology at Boston College William Kilpatrick observes that “true Christianity does not mix well with psychology. When you try to mix them, you often end up with a watered-down Christianity instead of a Christianized psychology. But the process is subtle and is rarely noticed.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore the fundamental difference between biblical and integrationist approaches rests in each camp’s interpretation of 2 Timothy 3:16, which addresses the sufficiency of Scripture for handling all aspects of life.

*Sufficiency of Scripture.* Second Timothy 3:16–17 affirms, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for

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<sup>12</sup> “The Confessional Statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition,” The Biblical Counseling Coalition, last modified 2018, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>.

<sup>13</sup> Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 41.

<sup>14</sup> William Kirk Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 14.

training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Therefore, it can be said that the Bible is a self-revelation of who God is, as well as what he is doing. Louis Berkhof explains that the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that everything that God, Christ, the prophets, and apostles said is contained therein, “but simply the written Word is sufficient for the moral and spiritual needs of individuals and of the Church.”<sup>15</sup> Whether the words are directly from God himself, or spoken through his prophets, all Scripture is given with perfect accuracy and with absolute authority. John Frame defines this sufficiency by writing that “Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life.”<sup>16</sup> David Powlison likewise affirms that “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.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, God has given his people all the tools that they will need for the problems they face in life. Those tools are exclusively found within the Scriptures.

*Staff Counselor, Associate Counselor, and Adjunct Counselor.* The Owen Center has three distinctions of counselors. Staff Counselor refers to a full-time counselor who possesses at least one master’s-level degree in biblical counseling. The Staff Counselor provides counseling to all situations, can teach in group settings, and writes educational materials for The Owen Center. For the means of this project, each course must be facilitated by a Staff Counselor. Associate Counselors are counselors who handle most types of cases but on a part-time basis. Adjunct Counselors take a consultant role,

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<sup>15</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933), 49.

<sup>16</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 618.

<sup>17</sup> David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 276.

taking very specific cases that require a more focused approach—i.e. cases that involve special needs, behavioral problems, or learning disabilities.

One limitation applied to this project. To prove the project's significance two assessments were given to the participants: one at the beginning and one at the end of the training program. The limitation was that the participants may have been familiar with the subject matter of the assessment when they were given the final assessment. To mitigate this, a few short-answer questions were added to the post-survey to allow participants to voice any new information or comments they might have had about what they learned from the training that was not included in the original questions. The second limitation is the breadth of the content. Simply put, everything the participants need to know about biblical counseling cannot be taught in five two-hour sessions. This was a survey course designed to give the basic tools and inspire more interest in biblical counseling.

A few delimitations applied to this project. First, due to time constraints, the training was shortened from twelve to ten hours. This means that the material taught in the training had to be the most important and useful information needed to produce results. Second, the participants had to commit to all five two-hour sessions to maintain consistency in the findings. If a participant missed one of the trainings, a video recording of the class session was provided for them. They had to commit to watching the video of the missed class before attending the next session.

### **Conclusion**

If the church is going to fulfill the call of Scripture, then it must prepare to address modern issues that may not be explicitly mentioned in Scripture. But they need to be able to do so by utilizing a biblical worldview about all of life. That is the task that this project aimed to build up. The following chapters will provide a biblical basis for this

calling and a historical basis for the need for biblical counseling to be returned to the church.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH LEADERS TO COUNSEL BIBLICALLY

The impetus for this chapter is to show how God’s Word exhorts all Christians, especially ministry leaders, to understand and fulfill the call to biblically counsel God’s people by presenting a viable and foundational methodology rooted in the Word of God. To properly defend this thesis, there is no better foundational origin than the Bible. The argument of this project will utilize many different resources, but the Bible must be the foundation for training and guiding God’s people. The forthcoming bible passages and their exegesis will defend this call, exhorting pastors and church leaders to recognize the importance, necessity, and usefulness of counseling biblically.

#### **The Call for Biblical Counseling in the Church**

Without the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18b–20, the mission of the church becomes aimless. Jesus gave many exhortations to shepherd and teach his people throughout his ministry to the disciples. However, this charge formalized in his commission, directing, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus goes further than saying “preach my word;” he exhorts his disciples to get personal—making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Trinity, and teaching them to observe his commands. These tasks cannot be executed exclusively from behind a pulpit but demand relational

ministry. Thus, the main argument put forth by this section is that baptism and evangelism are only the beginning of the work of the shepherd/sheep relationship.

In Jesus’s opening words of the commission—“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”—the question arises, “What does this actually mean, and why does Jesus bring this up?” William Hendriksen explains, “He now commissions his apostles to proclaim the gospel throughout the world, [so that] they may know that moment by moment, day by day, they can lean on him.”<sup>1</sup> This might seem like common sense to a contemporary pastor, but when faced with problems such as PTSD, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Gender Dysphoria, or Seasonal Affective Disorder (to name just a few), Jesus’s words seem to become obsolete since these issues do not seem to appear in the time of his ministry. Hendriksen answers this conundrum by showing that the apostles are called to exhort everyone everywhere and in any circumstance to joyfully acknowledge Jesus’s authority in all problems and challenges they face when applying the gospel to those they encounter.<sup>2</sup>

After Jesus pronounces his ultimate authority, he gives the implications of what this means for those who follow him. ““Therefore,”” Leon Morris explains, “leads on to the fact that this has consequences for those who follow him here on earth.”<sup>3</sup> The disciple of Christ is not simply a follower of Christ, but he is now a teacher who is to share everything that Christ has shown him to all people and all nations. This is not simply evangelizing but caring for people to the fullest extent, following in the footsteps of their Master. Morris continues, “The Master is not giving a command that will merely secure nominal adherence to a group, but one that will secure wholehearted commitment

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1973), 998.

<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 1000.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 746.



to a person.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, disciples, must still abide by this hefty call to serve their Master day by day, caring for the people that he has called them to serve.

Jesus outlines a philosophy of ministry for properly caring for the souls of his people: making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Trinity, and teaching them how to adhere to his commands. Exegetically, it is important to understand the functioning of the Greek participle and verb usage in this passage. D. A. Carson explains that in the Greek, “‘go’—like ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’—is a participle. Only the verb ‘make disciples’ is imperative,” as *baptizontes* and *didaskontes* are participles governed by the imperative *mathēteusate*. He continues, “When a participle functions as a circumstantial participle dependent on an imperative, it frequently gains some imperatival force.”<sup>5</sup> This observation shows that the emphasis of the Commission then falls on the command to “make disciples,” *mathēteusate*.

John Albert Broadus gives an exemplary definition of “discipling” derived from this passage:

To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher, “taking his yoke” of authoritative “instruction,” (Matt 11:29) accepting what he says as true because he says it, and submitting to his requirements as right because he makes them. Towards a mere human and uninspired teacher we can properly feel and act thus only within narrow limits; but the Great Teacher has perfect wisdom and unlimited authority. We see then that Christ’s intimated authority (Matt 28:18) is not only the basis of our duty to disciple others, but the basis of all true discipleship....His teachings and requirements are perfectly wise and righteous and good, and we may see this to some extent at the outset, and more and more as we go on in the disciple’s life; but we accept them at once, and set about conforming to them, because he has a perfect right to be believed and obeyed.<sup>6</sup>

Broadus’s explanation of discipling a person goes much further than simply sharing the gospel message of salvation. He shows that if pastors are going to truly fulfill the Great

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<sup>4</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 666.

<sup>6</sup> John Albert Broadus, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 1886, StudyLight.org, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/jbm/matthew.html>, chap. on Matt 28, sec. on Matt 28:16–20, under Matt 28:19 in bold section “Teach.”

Commission, then they are to walk beside people to teach them how to learn and follow Jesus. Yes, the goal is that they may believe in Jesus as their only hope of salvation, but if the goal is not to also teach them how to learn and grow themselves, then ministry leaders are not fully comprehending Christ's call on their lives.

R. T. France also affirms the notion put forth by Carson and Broadus, showing that “discipleship” carries the main weight of the Commission, which is then divided into two subsets—baptizing and teaching. He writes, “The disciples were to call not for a superficial response but for total commitment to the new community, and to a life governed by *everything I have commanded you*.”<sup>7</sup> Thomas Lea and David Alan Black observe that as a fundamental part of this call to discipleship, “they were commanded to baptize as an act of repentance and commitment to God's people.”<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry explains, “Christianity is the religion of a sinner who applies for salvation from deserved wrath and from sin...and by sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and gives up himself to be the worshiper and servant of God...in all his ordinances and commandments.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, baptism serves as an outward sign of that inward washing.

Therefore, Jesus calls Christians to follow in the paths of the apostles in a lifelong pursuit of bringing people not only to a claim of salvation and baptism but to persuade them of their desperate need for a total commitment to the new community being governed by something more than mere man. Thus, again the point is shown that baptism and evangelism are only the beginning of the work of the shepherd/sheep relationship. Yes, there is a desperate need to convert the lost, but that is only the initial step of executing the full call of the Great Commission.

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<sup>7</sup> R. T. France, “Matthew,” in *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 944.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 274.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Thomas Scott (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “Matt 28:16–20.”

The apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood how the Great Commission related to the call of discipleship and relational ministry. He gives an explicit exhortation in Ephesians 4:11–16. Beginning with verses 11 and 12, Paul writes, “[God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Paul here is referring to the gifts that God has given directly to his people through the teaching and work of Christ, now communicated through the Holy Spirit. F. F. Bruce notes that these “‘gifts’ are the persons who exercise those ministries and who are said to be ‘given’ by the ascended Christ to his people to enable them to function and develop as they should.”<sup>10</sup> Bruce explains how these specific ministries are given in order to show that the apostles, prophets, and evangelists serve in temporary and extraordinary roles for the church limited to a specific time. Calvin explains, “Apostles, Evangelists, and Prophets were bestowed on the church for a limited time only, —except in those cases where religion has fallen into decay, and evangelists are raised up in an extraordinary manner to restore the pure doctrine which had been lost.”<sup>11</sup> They do not have, nor need, successors.

Now the shepherds and teachers may draw directly from their predecessor’s work, seeing that their roles consist of permanent offices in the life, witness, and history of the church drawing from God’s written Word as their ultimate authority. In this passage, when Paul is referring to “shepherds and teachers,” he is referring to those who are communicating the means of grace to the members of the church. Therefore, ‘shepherds and teachers’ can be understood to stand for any who are called to modern ministry by serving the kingdom of God in a role of teaching and authority. Therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 346.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 280.

these offices must have specific callings and qualifications as described by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–13. It is also noted that those who aspire to the calling of this office take on a greater weightiness, as James 3:1 warns, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Therefore, those who aspire to accept the call of shepherd or teacher must be sure that they are properly fulfilling the full breadth of their job description—especially before they begin attempting to execute the office.

Paul continues with the job description in Ephesians 4:12–13, stating the reason why leaders are given to the church is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” John Calvin states, “The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry.”<sup>12</sup> This is the calling that pastors must strive to fulfill—equipping their churches for the work of ministry, counseling them with the biblical truths so that they may strengthen the body of Christ. A church that cultivates spiritual maturity and mutual nourishment is a church that beautifully reflects the love of Christ. Yet, Calvin also warns those in authority: “In employing human instruments for accomplishing their salvation, God has conferred on men no ordinary favour.”<sup>13</sup>

It is through the usage of Scripture that the pastors, shepherds, and teachers come alongside their church members, seeing that this unity is attained through the faith and knowledge of the Son of God to bring the church to “mature manhood.” In modern Christendom, it is common for pastors to think their job ceases once they win the heart of the believer and they join the church. This is a grievous mistake, as Bruce comments,

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 282.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 282.

“When new believers are incorporated in the church, they require further ministry (as indeed do older believers): they need to be ‘shepherded’ and taught.”<sup>14</sup> This coincides with Paul’s warning in Acts 20:28 where he exhorts, “take heed to...all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to shepherd the church of God.” If immature Christians are not given proper counsel and guidance in their young faith, then Paul warns in Ephesians 4:14 that they will be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” If these church members are not shepherded, where will they turn when they face the problems of the brokenness of the world? The shepherds and teachers must lead their flock through these moments faithfully by “speaking the truth in love,” as Paul puts it (Eph 4:15). This then equates the call of making disciples to administering faithful biblical counseling.

As stated in Chapter 1, biblical counseling is a ministry of the Word of God focused on applying practical theology to the daily lives of people in a Christlike, interpersonal, and relational way. Biblical counseling is more than problem-solving, for it is not problem-centered or person-centered, but Christ-centered. By speaking the truth in love through biblical counseling, pastors delve deep into the lives of their flock tending to every need. If they fail to offer biblical counsel, the members of the body of Christ—guided by their sinful hearts—will look elsewhere to other worldviews that will never satisfy. Though the personal responsibility will fall on those who turn away, pastors must remember the warning of James 3:1 seeing that they will be judged for the way they equip the saints as well as their effectiveness in building up the body. In Luke 12:47–48,

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<sup>14</sup> F.F. Bruce further describes the implications of the Greek, stating, “The noun ‘pastor’ does not occur elsewhere in the NT in reference to a ministry in the church, but the derivative verb ‘to shepherd’ is used several times in this sense, and the noun ‘flock’ (also derived from the noun meaning ‘shepherd’) is used of the church.” See Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 347.

Jesus explains how people are responsible for what they know, and therefore a teacher must take heed of the full scope of the responsibility he is called to undertake.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus is then further glorified when people speak his word and loving one another, for a healthy church is marked by a congregation that loves Jesus and loves their neighbors as themselves. As Paul concludes this section in 4:16, “When each part is working properly, [it] makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Hendriksen comments, “The apostle knows that there is nothing so stabilizing as performing day by day loving service for Christ. No one learns truth faster than he who, with consecrated heart, teaches others. Let the Ephesians... plunge into the work of the kingdom.”<sup>16</sup> In a world of chaos, pastors must recognize the call to offer this stabilizing force of the love of Christ to those that they shepherd, train up, and make into disciples for the purposes of furthering the kingdom.

The exhortation from Paul in Ephesians 4:11–16 connects back to the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus calls his disciples to multiply. Not simply in a manner of large numbers, but skillfully and tactfully teaching each individual that belongs to the household of the faith. Bruce explains Paul’s context, “As the number of new churches increased, there would have been a call for more teachers to give young converts the basic instruction they needed.”<sup>17</sup> For the same reason, Paul gives the church in Thessalonica a similar exhortation, urging them to “admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thess 5:14). As the number of churches, and more specifically, church members grow, Paul gives great importance to the work of admonishment, teaching, and shepherding—all of which fall under the umbrella of healthy biblical counseling.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter H. Davids, “James,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. Carson et al., 1362.

<sup>16</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1967), 202.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 348.

Therefore, Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians only reiterates the call of Christ, calling the shepherds and teachers to focus on growing Christians to the full maturity that they may resemble their Savior, loving each other sacrificially by laying down one’s life for another. Preaching is the main function of teaching the flock, for it speaks the Word of God directly into the lives of many at once. However, if there is no effective means of applying the preaching directly to one’s life and community, the preaching immediately becomes less effective. Yes, the pastor hopefully incorporates application within the sermon delivery, but this application may only go so far if there is no functional relationship with the person who is hearing it. For example, a congregant cannot simply raise their hand during the sermon to ask the preacher to clarify his point. Thus, if a pastor is not open to relational ministry, that question may never be answered or even asked. If Paul calls all Christians to speak the truth in love for the edification of the body, how much more should pastors take up the call of relational ministry?

### **Sustainable Biblical Counseling Practices**

If a pastor is going to undertake this calling of shepherding and teaching the flock through the means of biblical counseling, then he must understand that he will need to take deliberate care in such a delicate, yet heavy, task. In 2021 alone, 38 percent of pastors indicated that they had considered quitting full-time ministry due to burnout. In fact, “One of the more alarming findings is that 46 percent of pastors under the age of 45 say they are considering quitting full-time ministry, compared to 34 percent of pastors 45 and older. Keeping the right younger leaders encouraged and in their ministry roles will be crucial to the next decade of congregational vitality in the U.S.”<sup>18</sup> This is an alarming statistic that exposes the drastic need for younger pastors to understand the calling they have taken upon themselves. If they are going to be shepherding and teaching the people

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<sup>18</sup> “38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought about Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year,” Barna Group, November 16, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>.

of God, then they must understand the weightiness of the burdens of a pastor and how to negate burnout in providing biblical counseling to those in need. By God's grace, he provides everything that a pastor needs to fulfill the work he has set before him as Paul encourages the leaders in Thessalonica: "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:24).

Paul warns in Galatians 6:1–2, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Paul directs this section to the "brothers," which is directly addressing "those who are spiritual." Though not exclusive to pastors, this message must be taken serious by those in spiritual leadership.

The call to restore an individual caught in a transgression is among one of the heftiest and most complex burdens that a pastor must fulfill. Alas, this is likely the area of shepherding that a pastor dreads the most, as seen in a survey of one thousand Protestant senior pastors, where only 16 percent of pastors said that their church had disciplined a member in the past year. The same survey shows that 55 percent of pastors said that no member had been disciplined during the entirety of their tenure.<sup>19</sup> If this is true, then Galatians 6:1 has by default become one of the most ignored exhortations in Scripture in the modern age.

Calvin shows that the avoidance of the call of Galatians 6:1 does not need to be so, given that the call to restoration is laid on those who are spiritual. He writes,

To what better purpose can their superior attainments be applied than to promote the salvation of the brethren? The more eminently any man is endowed with Divine grace, the more strongly is he bound to consult the edification of those who have been less favoured. But such is our folly, that in our best duties we are apt to fail,

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<sup>19</sup> Bob Smietana, "Church Discipline Focus of New Survey," *Baptist Press*, April 5, 2018, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/church-discipline-focus-of-new-survey/>.



and therefore need the exhortation which the apostle gives to guard against the influence of carnal views.<sup>20</sup>

Calvin gives a clear answer to the problem of sustainability. If this duty relies on one person, it cannot be done. Though, if done in a spirit of gentleness with the witness of two or three other spiritual leaders, then the member may be restored, as Jesus points out in Matthew 18:16–17. In all cases of restoration, one must “keep watch” on themselves as Paul warns for the more a pastor deals with darkness the more difficult it will be to see the light.

Richard Baxter takes note of this call in his exegesis of Acts 20:28: “Take heed unto yourselves and all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood.”<sup>21</sup> Baxter warns pastors that they must stay alert and attentive when dealing with the works of Satan in sinful men. He shows how if pastors do not keep watch on themselves, Satan will rope them in with the very people they are trying to restore. He explains that the devil is a much greater student than they are, warning that “you will see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself while he is offering you his bait,” and when he tricks you with temptations that are fitting to your disposition, “he will make you the instrument of your own ruin.”<sup>22</sup> So, if pastors are going to embark on the call of restoration and bearing others’ burdens through biblical counseling, then they must facilitate this ministry in a sustainable, healthy, and biblical manner. This will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

The context of Paul’s audience is also important to note. The Galatian people are described as being rampant drunkards prone to strife, pride, anger, fickleness, and

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: Updated and Abridged*, ed. Tim Cooper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 38.

impulsiveness.<sup>23</sup> Though these descriptions may apply to much of the New Testament audience, knowing this detail helps modern readers understand the gravity of Paul’s call to restore in gentleness in this section. It is easy to understand that the type of people described above include some of the most difficult people to work with in relational ministry, which is why a pastor must be equipped with baseline skills in biblical counseling.

Paul goes further in calling those who are spiritual to “bear one another’s burdens” so that they may “fulfill the law of Christ.” Another way to put this is to “jointly shoulder each member’s burdens.” Hendriksen explains,

Everybody should put his shoulder under the burdens under which this or that individual member is groaning, whatever these burdens may be. They must be carried jointly. The verb βασιταζω occurs more than twenty-five times in the New Testament. It is especially common in the Gospels and in Acts. It is used in connection with carrying a water-jar (Mark 14:13; Luke 22:6), a coffin (Luke 7:14), stones (John 10:31), money (carrying it away, stealing it: John 12:6), a corpse (transferring it from one place to another: John 20:15), a yoke (Acts 15:10), a man: Paul (Acts 21:35), and a woman (Rev. 17:7). Hence, here in Gal. 6:2 it can best be taken in the figurative sense of “carrying” each other’s burdens, lightening each other’s loads of difficulty and grief.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, suffering as a member within a church should be a mutual experience. This does not mean that it is always right for someone to bear another’s burdens, for there might be times for them to have their own burdens shared. Tim Keller comments, “This does not mean that we are to confront anyone we see sinning in any way...but we must not overlook someone ‘caught’—overtaken—by a sin.” He concludes “Christians need to be neither quick to criticize nor afraid to confront” for this is truly speaking the truth *in love*.<sup>25</sup> Scot McKnight states, “Paul is here addressing those who are restoring, and so we

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<sup>23</sup> Donald Guthrie includes this description of the readers of Galatians, though he also notes that his source text from J. B. Lightfoot might be too reliant on inference. For that reason, only a general description has been used. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 467.

<sup>24</sup> Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 232.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (London: Good Book, 2013), 166.

must envision the restorer as a person who undertakes not only to point out problems and sins, but also to carry the responsibility of helping that person become free of that entanglement.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Paul lays out a theme of mutual accountability encouraging pastors to see that bearing burdens of their members is a complex, yet noble, Christlike aspect of their job.

What is the goal of bearing one another’s burdens? Paul answers that it is to “fulfill the law of Christ.” Hendriksen writes that “this law of Christ is the principle of love for one another laid down by Christ (John 13:34; see also Gal. 5:14; cf. James 2:8).”<sup>27</sup> Fulfilling the law of Christ is not only a duty of the pastor, but it is the way he should perform his duty. Seeing Jesus’s tenderness and loving-kindness that he gives to the sick, burdensome, and needy should become the inspiration for pastors to follow. This is especially seen in Jesus’s confrontation of Peter in John 21:1–19, where Jesus provides a meal for the disciple who denied him three times. He asks Peter, three times in a tender tone, “Do you love me?” With each of Peter’s affirmative answers, Jesus pairs an exhortation: “Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.” Understanding Paul’s exhortation in Galatians 6:1–2 while considering the words of Jesus in John 21 helps the readers of Galatians to know that this call is simply a reiteration of the very call Jesus gave his disciples. Therefore, if one strives for the position of disciple of Christ, they must know that when they fail, Jesus’s loving encouragement graciously reminds them to keep moving in their kingdom work.<sup>28</sup>

Paul further encourages Christians to not boast in their work for their protection in Galatians 6:4–5. Anyone who strays away from the obligation set forth in 6:1–3 sets himself up thinking that he is above such weaknesses. Moisés Silva states,

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<sup>26</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 285.

<sup>27</sup> Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 233.

<sup>28</sup> See the similar exhortation given by God to his people in Haggai 2:3–9.

“Clearly the wonderful freedom for which Paul had fought during his ministry and especially in this letter does not entail an abandonment of moral obligations.”<sup>29</sup> As one can deduce from modern news headlines about the moral failures of Christian leaders, whenever these moral obligations described by Paul are abandoned, it is not the errant pastor who suffers the most, but the sheep that were placed under his care.

Therefore, to prevent such obligations from becoming a hindrance—better yet, a detriment—to the pastor of a church, he must surround himself with those who are also able to shepherd and teach the flock. This was the observation of Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, in Exodus 18:13–26. When Jethro arrives to see all that the Lord has done for his people, he sits with Moses for a single day of work as Moses acts as judge for all of the people of Israel. Jethro asks in verse 14, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” Moses explains that he is acting both as an intercessor and mediator for all of the people’s problems, burdens, and disputes, shepherding and teaching them the statutes of God and his laws. Jethro warns Moses in verses 17 and 18, “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” Jethro then gives Moses his own advice stating that he is to continue to do what he is doing in teaching the people all of the statutes of God, but he is also to look for “able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs...So it will be easier for you and that they will bear the burden with you.” It is only by this way of function Jethro states in verse 23 that “God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people will go to their place in peace.”

Moses was finally blooming in God’s call for his life. From a basket in the Nile, to a murderer on the run, to a Midian shepherd, to the leader of the most notable

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<sup>29</sup> Moisés Silva, “Galatians,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. Carson et al., 1219.

genealogical exodus in history, Moses now finds himself embroiled in the day-to-day deluge of dealing with the common folk problems. This immediately shows that one does not simply age out of personal ministry. Now, from a sustainability angle, Moses was doing his most important work yet—teaching and applying the Word of God to his people. God had always provided for Moses throughout his life, and if Israel was going to continue as a nation with Moses as its resident prophet and priest, then he needed God’s help once again.

Keil and Delitzsch propose that the people who were coming to Moses were likely coming to inquire through an oracle to gain a divine decision in their disputes, since every decision Moses made was based on the Word of God.<sup>30</sup> Inasmuch as Moses was consulting the will of God to help the people who were under some type of burden, this can be likened to the call Paul gives to the spiritual leaders in the book of Galatians. Keil and Delitzsch point out that Moses’s philosophy of ministry was not only tiresome for both himself and the people, but due to the long waiting the people “very often began to take the law into their own hands on account of the delay in the judicial decision, and so undermined the well-being of the community at large.”<sup>31</sup>

Jethro was not simply suggesting a better way of conducting care for God’s people, rather he was exposing a potential problem that would have been detrimental to God’s people. This problem continues to persist in modern churches where the adjudication of disputes among believers and the burdens that they may be bearing often get handed over to resources outside the church. According to a study conducted by Lifeway Research, 65 percent of family members believe local churches should talk more openly about mental illness while 49 percent of pastors report that they rarely or never

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<sup>30</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament, trans. James Martin (1864; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:86.

<sup>31</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 2:86.

speaking about mental illness to their church.<sup>32</sup> T. Dale Johnson attributes this modern problem to the specialization and professionalization of pastoral care. He explains,

When problems occur, whether they are due to sin or suffering, our first inclination even within the church is to seek professional help. This pattern is a neglect of our biblical mandate to care well for one another. Seminaries began teaching clinical pastoral education in the 1930s and 1940s. Distinct departments began in clinical psychology and psychology of religion in order to distinguish the work of mental health counselor in churches from the soul work once done by the pastors. The change was intentional and had legitimate effects on how pastors viewed themselves and how churches viewed the role of the pastor. No longer was the pastor viewed as an expert trained in soul care, so church members began patronizing the trained professionals.<sup>33</sup>

In Moses's shepherding dilemma, the problem can be understood by seeing that over two million people made up the nation of Israel at this point, and they had not yet received the Ten Commandments or the other laws of God that guided them in living. As for modern-day churches, they have the luxury of the Ten Commandments and the complete teachings of Jesus Christ and his fulfillment of the law. Therefore, the resources God has given must be used in a God-honoring way. Moses sets the example of fully depending on God for the work that he is to facilitate. His job was threefold, as he was to "teach the people the decrees and laws of God. He was to show them the way to live and was to instruct them in the duties they were to perform."<sup>34</sup> Thus a theme is emerging throughout Scripture that specifically describes the pastor's role as shepherd and teacher of the people that God places under his care and the call on the people to submit to that care.

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<sup>32</sup> "13 Stats on Mental Health and the Church," Lifeway Research, May 1, 2018, <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/05/01/13-stats-on-mental-health-and-the-church/>.

<sup>33</sup> T. Dale Johnson Jr., *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 62. See also T. Dale Johnson Jr., *The Professionalization of Pastoral Care: The SBC's Journey from Pastoral Theology to Counseling Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 103–30; David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 238–57.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Bentley, *Travelling Homeward: Exodus Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1999), 212–13.

It was clear that Moses was attempting to sincerely fulfill God's calling on his life, yet there were limits to this method that God exposed to Moses through Jethro's advice. Philip Ryken comments,

The principle here can be applied to almost any ministry situation. People never run out of needs; so when we take on the responsibility to help meet those needs, we will have as much work as we can handle. The problem comes when we try to carry burdens that are bigger than the ones that God has actually called us to bear. God never intends for us to do all the work ourselves. This is why he has placed us in the body of Christ, in which we are dependent on the help of others. It is utter folly for ministers...to think that they can do it all by themselves. Christian ministry should never be a one-man show...It is unwise to think that we can always handle more and more...This is harmful to us, and in the end it will be harmful to others. This was a significant part of Jethro's concern.<sup>35</sup>

If Jethro had not stood up and confronted Moses on the lack of sustainability in his plan for caring for the sheep of Israel, the nation itself likely could have imploded, given their forthcoming fickleness and rebellion as seen in the records of Judges.

In applying Jethro's advice, it is necessary to see what kind of men were to be appointed as helpers of Moses. Jethro says Moses is to look for "able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe." Peter Enns observes that "what is significant here is both what is stated and what is not. The explicit reference to dishonest gain anticipates a common temptation of leadership, namely, bribery—one that will rear its head repeatedly throughout Israel's history."<sup>36</sup> Men that were easily tempted to bribery or self-gratification were to be ignored for the role as overseer. This is because men who act in such a manner usually were the ones that only created more

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<sup>35</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 483.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 372. He also notes, "Some of the qualifications cited in Numbers 11:16 and Deuteronomy 1:9–18 are not mentioned here, however: people who are known, respected, and above all wise and understanding. The qualifications of Exodus 18 and Numbers 11/Deuteronomy 1 are likely two separate events, with unique circumstances that demand their own set of qualifications."

disputes for Moses to adjudicate.<sup>37</sup> If he was to employ such men, then the shepherding structure of Israel would be a disaster—making them look just like the rest of the world.

Jethro’s advice for Moses to appoint wise and God-fearing men as his helpers was an act that made shepherding and adjudication more sustainable for God’s leaders and his people. This is why Paul carried forward similar advice in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, explaining the qualifications for spiritual men if they aspired to be overseers in the church of Christ. Hendriksen makes an important distinction here when he states, “It is decidedly wrong for anyone to stretch out his hand in order to lay hold on the holy office. Such sinful ambition deserves to be condemned. The office should seek the man, not the man the office.”<sup>38</sup> When a pastor is looking to establish a sustainable mode of shepherding and counseling within his church, he must look for men who are willing to suffer innumerable hardships for the sake of Christ. If this is not their leading motivation in taking up the office of elder, then they will be tempted to lead people astray from the Word of God.

George Knight III separates the office of elder in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 into two categories: personal self-discipline and maturity, and the ability to relate well to others and to teach and care for them. He says, “These two are intertwined, although there seems to be a tendency to move from the personal to the interpersonal.”<sup>39</sup> The reason for the excursion to 1 Timothy 3:1–7 is to show that there is a clearly established order set for church governance that itself is rooted in Exodus 18. The qualifications for those who will be called to help bear the load of personal ministry must be rooted in their biblical origin. Ryken explains that in Exodus 18:13–26 “The qualifications [Jethro] gave were not financial or intellectual. But moral and spiritual.”<sup>40</sup> Jethro’s advice must be carried

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<sup>37</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 371–73.

<sup>38</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1957), 118.

<sup>39</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 156.

<sup>40</sup> Ryken, *Exodus*, 484.



forward to modern-day churches, as this is what Paul expects the church leaders to continue as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ himself, teaching his word to those who are under their care.

### **Scripture as a Foundation for Counseling**

The call of pastors to counsel biblically that has been expounded thus far should show one major theme—God’s Word is sufficient for the task at hand. Therefore, pastors must fully understand the Bible’s own claim to its authority. Keeping in line with Jesus’s exhortation to make disciples, Paul exhorts Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” As mentioned earlier in this chapter, if Scripture contains all that a pastor needs to be “equipped for every good work,” then this claim should raise the question for the modern church, “What about the modern problems that seem to be missing in Scripture?” For instance, schizophrenia, psychological diagnoses, critical race theory, gender dysphoria, eugenics, stem cell research, in vitro fertilization, artificial intelligence, and evolution are all topics not specifically mentioned in Scripture. If Paul’s words to Timothy are true, then a pastor should be equipped to approach and address such issues, even though they may not specifically be named in Scripture.

For pastors to adequately utilize Scripture for these issues, it is essential to understand the emphasis of the word “all.” When Paul says “all Scripture,” he shows that it is not just particular subsets of Psalms or epistles that are profitable for the areas of counseling listed, but Scripture in its entirety can be utilized to build up the body of Christ. Hendriksen comments, “The word God-breathed, occurring only here indicates that ‘all scripture’ owes its origin and contents to the divine breath, the Spirit of God.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hendriksen, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 302.

Albert Mohler adds, “The careful translation of this text reveals that the Bible was not merely ‘inspired’ in the sense that the eventual product was recognized to represent a superior wisdom; the text was specifically breathed out by God.”<sup>42</sup> These statements show that the Bible is not a merely good moral book, but rather something supernatural in nature. It is truly something remarkable. B. B. Warfield once described the Bible as an “oracular book,” writing that Scripture is “the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says—not a book, then, in which one may, by searching, find some word of God, but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God.”<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, when a struggling church member approaches their pastor with a problem, the pastor’s hope in helping this individual comes not from his own counseling ability, but rather the gracious gift of God’s very Word. It is an essential task for the pastor to utilize God’s Word for every good work, seeing that when he looks to other sources to comfort God’s people, then he leads them astray. For not only is all Scripture God-breathed, but it is also “profitable for teaching.” Calvin comments, “When [Paul] says this, he means that it is corrupted by sinful abuse, when this usefulness is not sought. And thus, he indirectly censures those unprincipled men who fed the people with vain speculations, as with wind.”<sup>44</sup> Calvin only further exposes the dangers that a pastor may face if he mishandles or neglects the Word of God.

Using 1 Timothy 3:16, Jeremy Pierre succinctly describes the utility of Scripture in a threefold way by showing how it is sufficient to form a comprehensive psychology for Christians to utilize. First, he describes how Scripture is sufficient to

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<sup>42</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic View of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. James R. Merrick and Stephen F. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 38.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1948), 119.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 229.

teach something, that is, everything necessary for doctrine and salvation. He writes, “Scripture interprets itself and needs no outside voice to make its message understood. Furthermore, the material aspect of Scripture is sufficient to reveal the entirety of what people need to know about God, themselves, salvation, and everything that pertains to the Christian faith.”<sup>45</sup> Second, he shows that Scripture is sufficient to do something, that is, everything necessary for people to receive and know God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He adds, “When God speaks in the Bible, he does something. And his words are the sufficient means through which the Holy Spirit’s actions take place.”<sup>46</sup> Third, Pierre describes how Scripture is sufficient to see something, that is, all of creation from a God-ordained perspective.<sup>47</sup> This explains why Christians should see the world differently than everyone else, for we understand the irrationalities of life in the eternal sense, whereas everyone else is limited to mortal logic. Pastors who apprehend the power and utility of God’s Word may only then realize the full strength and potential God’s Word has for helping teach and shepherd those under their care.

Pastors must also note the arrangement of Paul’s directives for the use of Scripture. According to the Greek, 2 Timothy 3:17 can be understood as all Scripture being “profitable for teaching and reproof, correction and training in righteousness, so that man might be complete and equipped.” George Knight III highlights, “These four πρὸς phrases are arranged in two pairs, each with a negative word and a positive word, the first pair dealing with belief and the second with action.”<sup>48</sup> These pairings become very prominent when compared to Pierre’s threefold exegesis discussed above. The pairings of teaching/reproof and correction/training can help pastors as they seek to

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<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 95.

<sup>46</sup> Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient,” 95–96.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient,” 95–96.

<sup>48</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 449.

utilize the role of Scripture in the shepherding, preaching, and counseling roles of their ministry. Hendriksen goes further by interpreting 2 Timothy 3:16–17 as instituting a fourfold task, stating,

The teacher needs “all scripture” in order to enable him to perform his fourfold task (teaching, administering reproof, correction, training in righteousness), with a glorious purpose in mind, a purpose which in his own way and at his own time God will cause to be realized in the hearts of all people: that the man of God may be equipped, for every good work thoroughly equipped.<sup>49</sup>

Hendriksen shows that it is the task of every spiritual leader to impart the knowledge of God for the ability of proper reproof and correction so that the people of God may grow in righteousness and be prepared for every good work laid before them.

Another implication for the call for pastors in counseling their churches is for God’s Word to be fully utilized for every situation. Hendriksen authoritatively states, “Paul (and the Holy Spirit speaking through him) is not satisfied until the Word of God has fully accomplished its mission, and the believer has reached ‘the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’”<sup>50</sup> This is why Michael Bentley encourages, “Each of God’s people should be servants of God who are workmen (and women) who need not be ashamed because we are correctly handling, and teaching, the Word of God.”<sup>51</sup> For when God’s servants are skillfully and faithfully utilizing the Word of God in caring for the needs of their people—even the hard cases—then they are fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ in making disciples of all nations.

### **Scripture as a Functional Resource for Counseling**

Now for the question, “What do pastors do with problems that are not directly mentioned in Scripture? Are they still called to administer teaching and guidance on a

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<sup>49</sup> Hendriksen, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 303.

<sup>50</sup> Hendriksen, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 303–4.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Bentley, *Passing on the Truth: 1 & 2 Timothy Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1997), 280.

problem that is not mentioned in Scripture?” Though this will be discussed at length in the next chapter, it seems relevant to mention here, given that this is one of the main hindrances to a pastor’s acceptance of the call of biblical counseling. The premise of the question “What does the Bible say about schizophrenia?” does not always assume the position of the heart of the counselee asking for help. Our first question should not be, “What does the Bible say?” but rather, “Where is this person’s heart and how can the Bible encourage them in this circumstance?” David Powlison comments on 2 Timothy 3:14–17 by writing, “The utter simplicity and unsearchable complexity of Scripture enlighten us about God, and about ourselves, about...true and false, grace and judgment, about the world that surrounds us with its many forms of suffering and beguilement, with its opportunities to shed light into darkness.”<sup>52</sup> Powlison shows that it does not matter if a problem is specifically listed in Scripture or not, but rather, how the pastor can graciously apply biblical principles to whatever their counselee may be facing. When a pastor abdicates any opportunity to speak into a person’s problem using Scripture, they are unfortunately propagating the lie that God cannot help all problems.

The theme of the original question only shows how the modern mental health counseling paradigm has become so dominant, often clouding the minds of believers to the vitality of the Scripture and the design of God’s church.<sup>53</sup> This is also what Paul warned in Colossians 2:8–10 where he appeals, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

If Scripture is fully sufficient for equipping and building up the saints to fulfill the Great Commission, then Paul’s warning to the Christians of the Colossian church

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<sup>52</sup> David Powlison, “Is the Adonis Complex in *Your Bible?*,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 22, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 43.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, 8.

exposes the same problem that the church faces today. This problem is that the church falls prey to new and modern philosophies based on man's own reasoning. In the greater context of Colossians 2:8–19, Paul was facing heretical attacks on two theological principles: salvation (2:8–15) and sanctification (2:16–19). Paul understood the seriousness of these heresies, foreseeing that if they were to succeed in swaying the newfound church, the progress of the church thus far would collapse as another trivial historical movement. Paul knew that he was a part of something much bigger than just another heretical cult. His words expose how Scripture is not being properly utilized to defend the main beliefs of the church.

Richard Melick Jr. gives a further description of what Paul was facing in his warning to the churches:

The false teaching made inroads through a medium that Paul called “hollow and deceptive philosophy...” Paul shows that this philosophy “...had no substance. Following it led to nothingness. It was devoid of truth and, therefore, impotent. Strangely, there is little apart from this passage to define the teaching, and it has remained a puzzle for centuries. Whatever it was, it was the medium for destructive heresy which threatened the very life of the church.”<sup>54</sup>

Melick shows that Paul's description of these heresies has many implications for the modern church, seeing that the philosophy was human, elementary, and non-Christian.<sup>55</sup> In today's culture, contemporary philosophies could easily be described in the same way. Most modern philosophies are very humanistic driven by the works of the flesh. For instance, consider the current philosophy of postmodernism, which rejects the concept of universal truth. The main argument is simply that of pardoning any belief that does not match the beholder, and thus the beholder can never be proven wrong. Such a philosophy is entirely humanistic and utterly unbiblical. Calvin observes that Paul “places Christ in opposition to the elements of the world, equally as to the tradition of men, by which he

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<sup>54</sup> Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 252.

<sup>55</sup> Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 253.

intimates, that whatever is hated in man's brain is not in accordance with Christ, who has been appointed us by the Father as our sole Teacher."<sup>56</sup>

What is Paul's answer to this humanistic, elementary, and non-Christian heresy? It is a reminder of the person of Christ himself. He says in Colossians 2:9, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." This is a timely reminder that the church will always endure persecution, yet most of the time that persecution will not look like it did for the Colossian Christians. It is nimble and potent, a new and fresh philosophy to take a culture captive—away from the truth of Scripture. Today this may look like the rise of the sexual revolution, the assurance of macro-evolution theory, or as simple as a personality test that allows one to feel like they belong to a group of individuals of the same number. Calvin continues explaining how "all doctrines are foreign to Christ that make the worship of God, which we know to be spiritual, according to Christ's rule, to consist in the elements of the world, and also such as fetter the minds of men by such trifles and frivolities, while Christ calls us directly to himself."<sup>57</sup>

As a pastor seeks to counsel his congregation biblically understanding the power of the Word of God is essential, but Colossians 2:8–10 shows the grievous consequences of neglecting God's Word for the full equipping of the saints. This would only happen if the pastor did not understand the usefulness of Scripture, did not believe in its sufficiency, or was swept up by some other philosophy that he found to be more appealing. Now it is important to note that Paul is not giving a full condemnation of *all* philosophies, for true and genuine philosophy will always enlighten one to the truths of Scripture by only confirming what God has already said. John Davenant explains that philosophy will only be found to be vain and deceitful when it is carried beyond its

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<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 181.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 181.

proper bounds by attempting to determine certain truths that cannot be judged by the criterion set forth by God. He writes that “when [philosophy] would determine concerning human justification, reconciliation with God, the mode of Divine worship, or of other matters relating to faith, it is to be exploded.”<sup>58</sup> Psychology, New Age Spiritualism, and mindfulness are only a few of the philosophies that have taken the church captive, but more will come. That is why if pastors fail in their task to utilize God’s Word in the analysis of these worldviews, they fail to defend the people under their care as Christ loves them—by speaking the truth in love.

### **Methodological Principles for Counseling Biblically**

Speaking the truth in love does not always have to be a hard confrontation, for we should be speaking in love much sooner than the need for correction arises. Paul in Galatians 5:13–14 encourages, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” How can this passage lay forth a methodology of counseling people biblically? We must first understand the implications of the freedom found in Christ.

In Galatians 5:13–14, Paul sets the stage to describe the dynamic work of both the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit, a theme that will be present in any pastoral situation that arises. It is this freedom that pastors must remind their flock of, seeing that the remnants of their sinful natures have not yet been fully mortified. This is the impetus for John Owen’s famous question: “Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.”<sup>59</sup> If pastors truly love their neighbors as themselves, it should be

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<sup>58</sup> John Davenant, *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, trans. Josiah Allport (1831; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 391.

<sup>59</sup> John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 50.



one of their main priorities to approach every believer with encouragement and vigor to at times aid them in their pursuit of holiness, while at other times to grieve with them when the sufferings of the fallen world become unbearable. If a person is belligerently impeding on the peace of his or her neighbor, becoming a risk to himself, becoming crushed by the weight of suffering, or all three, it is a pastor's job to walk with him showing him the light of Christ.

Galatians 5:13–14 is also similar to 1 John 4:18–19, which says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” In light of the previous discussion about the avoidance of church discipline, whenever a pastor is afraid to utilize the Word of God because of the punishment of their negative reaction, then he is fearing that person instead of loving them. Because each counseling session deals with unique suffering, each case must be approached with wisdom, love, and grace. Romans 15:1–4 reminds us that those who are strong “have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves...for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Utilizing Galatians 5:13–14, 1 John 4:7–21, and Romans 15:1–4, a theology for biblical counseling within the church can be found. It should begin with dependence on the Holy Spirit to work through the Scripture. Therefore, the methodology of counseling should be *biblical*. The pastor should be head overseer of the counseling ministry. Yet, the pastor alone will not be sufficient. He should then raise up those who are holy and honorable to be elders and lay leaders. These lay leaders act as the means of soul care to the members of the flock while bringing the more serious cases to the pastor for consultation. Then, those who are trained up by the shepherds provide the “neighborly” counseling, understanding that all Christians can be qualified to bear each other's burdens out of the call from Galatians 5:13–14 to use their freedom found in

Christ to serve one another. Strong faithful women who are capable should also be involved in this process, following the guidance given in Titus 2:3–5. For Paul’s words are not limited to the leaders of the church in Galatians 5:13–14, but rather apply to all that know the freedom and love of Christ.

Thus, the methodology should be biblically based in seeking to love one another, growing in deeper relationships with those within the community, speaking the truth in love, and therefore executing the Great Commission in building the church up with new disciples. When a church is truly loving one another out of the freedom found in Christ alone, the work of the Holy Spirit will produce a natural progression of growth in relationships and spiritual maturity. This is the wonderful work that the Lord has called every pastor to fulfill, resting only in the blessings of the Holy Spirit to carry those pastors are called to care about most—their flock.

### **Conclusion**

The thesis that this chapter set forth to defend is simple—the church should be equipped to care for all the needs of God’s people. It should not only care about theological, financial, or social needs, but also the mental, physical, and emotional needs of God’s people. As John Kwasny states, “Ultimately, the church is not to just tolerate or endure sufferers in its midst, but welcome, pursue, and embrace sufferers as full members of the body of Christ.”<sup>60</sup> If pastors abdicate the call to counsel that is thoroughly expressed in Scripture, then God’s people will be tempted to look elsewhere for answers that they do not receive from their church. This is an avoidable problem that God cares deeply about, as should the men that he calls to ministry.

Seeing Jesus’s call to the disciples to “go therefore and make disciples” as the philosophy of ministry, it is only when a pastor fully understands the scope of making

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<sup>60</sup> John C. Kwasny, *Suffering in 3-D: Connecting the Church to Disease, Disability, and Disorder* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2019), 22.

“disciples” that the commission is fulfilled. Robert Jones, Kristin Kellen, and Rob Green conclude, “Pastors who take their role to heart should view themselves and be viewed by others as counselors, called by God to excel in biblical counseling.”<sup>61</sup> God’s Word shows that pastors are called to focus on their counseling as a private ministry of the Word of God just as much as the public ministry of the Word. As Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

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<sup>61</sup> 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, 2021), 27.

### CHAPTER 3

#### AN APPLICATION OF THE HISTORY OF SOUL CARE TO THE MODERN CHURCH

Although biblical counseling as a term might sound like a newer concept, the practice of its principles is nothing new. Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to his people, instructing them in the way they should go and counseling them with his loving eye upon them, as seen in Psalm 32:8. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul explains the idea in Romans 15:14 when he writes that “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.” Paul’s exhortation carries over into the forming of the early church as it becomes apparent in the early Christian literature that the care of souls was one of the main priorities for the apostles and church fathers. Thus, to the early church, the terminology of “biblical counseling” was simply that—care of the soul. The use of Scripture reading, study, and discussion was paramount in the reeducation, reformation, and reclamation of people’s souls.

Jesus himself was a teacher who deeply cared for the souls he encountered. If soul care was at the center of his teaching, there is the expectation that it should be one of the main focuses of the church to this day. Throughout church history, there are few who have contributed to a theology of soul care. However, those who have contributed are incredibly insightful in their assessments and guidance, giving a firm foundation for the principles of modern biblical counseling. This project will not be able to go through every contributor, but the most impactful authors throughout the early church, medieval period, reformation, and modern era will be examined to show how their work affirms the

call of soul care from Scripture and how pastors can realize this call through biblical counseling today.

### **Soul Care in the Early Church and Medieval Period**

It can be said that the practice of soul care in the early church was simply a continuation of the model that Jesus gave his disciples. It is evident in the work of Paul that the experience and culture of the early Christian communities were deeply engrained with the practices of mutual edification (*aedificatio mutua*) and fraternal correction (*correptio fraternal*).<sup>1</sup> It was through these practices that the members of the church encouraged one another in all aspects of life and instructed each other through the Word of Christ in order to edify the corporate church and the individual member.<sup>2</sup> Though these practices were modeled and taught by Christ and the apostles, many of the church fathers expounded on the aspect of Christian living and the care of souls pertaining to the role of the priest. A few of these men are Clement of Rome (AD 35–99), Gregory of Nazianzus (330–89 AD), Ambrose of Milan (AD 339–97), John Chrysostom (AD 347–407), Augustine (AD 354–430), and Gregory the Great (AD 540–604).

Building upon the foundation of Scripture, the apostles, and early church writings such as the *Didache*, Clement of Rome aimed to teach the believers in the early church a philosophy and application of a Christian ethical agenda.<sup>3</sup> This was not new information, but a new application of the principles displayed by Christ. Clement formalized the teachings into a curriculum of sorts that could be taught in a repeatable and effective manner to new Christians. This ethical agenda took clearer shape within the work of Gregory of Nazianzus, who served as a strong advocate of being molded and

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<sup>1</sup> John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 85.

<sup>2</sup> For biblical references, see Rom 14:19; 15:14; Eph 4:25–32; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:11–14; 2 Thess 3:15.

<sup>3</sup> Clement of Rome, quoted in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Penguin, 1968), 52.

molding others by Scripture. Gregory saw this task of ethically and morally guiding others as “the art of arts and the science of sciences,” for the pastor acts as a “physician of souls’ who has to treat a sickness found within ‘the hidden man of the heart’...a task more difficult than the medical physician, because it deals with ‘the diagnosis and cure of our habits, passions, lives, wills, and whatever else is within us.’”<sup>4</sup> Gregory goes further in this comparison between physician and pastor by stating,

For these reasons I allege that our office as physicians [of the soul] far exceeds in toilsomeness, and consequently in worth, that which is confined to the body; and further, because the latter is mainly concerned with the surface, and only in a slight degree investigates the causes which are deeply hidden. But the whole of our treatment and exertion is concerned with the hidden man of the heart.<sup>5</sup>

John McNeill comments on Gregory’s work, stating, “The soul must be given wings to fly to God. The necessity of attentiveness and watchful devotion makes the task of the physician of souls an exacting one, and to Gregory almost terrifying.”<sup>6</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus took notice of the great need for soul care within the early church, thus, his exhortation to pastors to be “physicians of the soul” has become a timeless and harrowing task to uphold.

Ambrose of Milan continued this application in his book *On the Duties of Clergy*, which describes scriptural examples of the four classical virtues—wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance.<sup>7</sup> He links these virtues with explicitly Christian virtues, including faith, hope, and love. The importance of Ambrose’s work is the direct application and development of a code of ethics for the Christian life delivered through the means of soul care. McNeill states, “In Ambrose, casuistry becomes a noble ally of

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<sup>4</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations* 2.21 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 7:209).

<sup>6</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 108.

<sup>7</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 105.

ethical idealism.”<sup>8</sup> He recognized that the common ethical answers to moral questions would not change, but the method of addressing the questions would. Through applying Christian principles to common reason and contemporary conundrums, the church fathers, such as Clement of Rome, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Ambrose of Milan, awakened the Christian social conscience by showing that all of Scripture applies to all of life’s circumstances and problems of the soul.<sup>9</sup> They became pioneers of soul care in the early church, carving out the path forward for their successors to build upon.

John Chrysostom was a contemporary of both Gregory of Nazianzus and Ambrose of Milan, serving as the archbishop of Constantinople in the late fourth century. He emphasized the role of the priest as one who should take up the calling that Christ gave to Peter when he said, “Tend to my sheep” in John 21:16. He stressed that ministers are representatives of Christ, carrying out their calling very close to the Lord’s heart. Chrysostom utilizes two arguments to emphasize and describe the work of the minister. First is that of Jesus’s calling of Peter, seeing that a pastor should be a dedicated shepherd of his sheep. Chrysostom nuanced this analogy by stating, “You cannot treat men with the same authority with which a shepherd treats a sheep.” This is because “it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice.”<sup>10</sup> In presenting this view, Chrysostom attempts to show that the pastor must care for people in the same manner as Christ did but refrain from becoming Christ himself. The second argument Chrysostom makes is likening the priest to a soul and the congregation to the body, citing as evidence that the church is the body of Christ and is subject to its spiritual

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<sup>8</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville, Popular Patristics, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 56.

head. In the same manner, the priest should be the spiritual head of the body, standing apart from it in holiness with the ability to nurture, care, and educate those within it.<sup>11</sup> Like Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom also compared the pastor's role to that of a physician, focusing on Scripture as the main instrument of healing. He writes, "By means of this, we raise up the soul when prostrate, and cool it when fevered, and cut off what is superfluous, and fill up with deficiencies, and do everything else which contributes to the health of the soul."<sup>12</sup> Chrysostom, often revered for his effective preaching, was driven by the theology of soul care—and it clearly made an impact on those under his care.

Another contemporary of Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus was Augustine. Augustine, being one of the most well-known church fathers, followed the same thought in showing that the Bible is not simply a religious book, but more powerful than anything else in the world, able to cut to the core of the inner person and address the wretchedness of the heart. In his most famous work, *Confessions*, he describes the way he was personally impacted by Scripture: "When I had been chastened by your Holy Writ and my wounds had been touched by your healing hand, I should be able to see and understand the difference between presumption and confession."<sup>13</sup> Augustine, along with the other church fathers, displays a high view of the necessity and utility of Scripture in pastoral care that should not be neglected but carried forward in pastoral ministry today.

Nearly 230 years after Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, and Chrysostom, Pope Gregory the Great built upon their work by writing one of the first formal guides on the function of soul care, appropriately titled *Pastoral Care*.<sup>14</sup> The argument can be made that Gregory the Great's work served as the primary source for pastoral care within the

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Chrysostom, quoted in Johnson, *Foundations of Soul Care*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 154.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 11 (New York: Newman, 1978).



church until Martin Bucer wrote his famous book, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, in 1538.<sup>15</sup> Within his work, Gregory the Great describes the office of a priest as a role of authority over souls, and the government of souls as the art of arts. McNeill expounds on this terminology, writing, “The guide of souls must be a compassionate neighbor to all, but superior in spiritual qualities. He should be a mother in tenderness, but a father in discipline.”<sup>16</sup> In *Pastoral Care*, Gregory the Great provides a detailed methodology of what the priestly role should be. This includes an in-depth description of the priest’s conduct, thought, speaking ability, humility, zeal, means of correction, and personal devotion. Within this description, Gregory speaks to the role of the modern pastor in caring for the souls of his constituents by writing,

But those who rule others should show themselves such that their subjects are unafraid to reveal their hidden secrets to them. Thus, when these little ones are enduring the waves of temptation, they will have recourse to the pastor’s understanding as to a mother’s bosom; and in the solace of his comforting words and in their prayerful tears they will cleanse themselves when they see themselves defiled by the sin that buffets them.<sup>17</sup>

This description serves as a precursor to thirty-five admonitions of the pastoral role and how he is to go about each of them. Through these qualities, a priest was to imitate Christ as he seeks to not only serve the needy but also offer hope, analyze the heart, and provide biblical, Christlike counsel.

An important concept in Gregory the Great’s assessment of the heart was *consideratio*. Andrew Purves describes *consideratio* as “the exercise of introspection that examines both inner motives and experiences and outer actions in such a way that a balance is established between them.” In understanding and utilizing *consideratio*, one seeks to find a balance between the body and soul by mindfully reflecting and reasoning

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<sup>15</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 10. Bucer’s work will be discussed at length below.

<sup>16</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, 58.

within his own heart. This idea is not to be confused with the work of St. Benedict who taught about *contemplatio*, for the meaning of contemplation is limited to a single-minded devotion to one object of thought. *Consideratio* includes the balance of spiritual, physical, personal, and social dimensions allowing one to look heavenward and earthward in a practical sense. To properly apply the act of *consideratio*, one must understand the varying circumstances that an individual is going through, as what might be helpful to one could be hurtful to another.<sup>18</sup> Gregory explains, “As it is not usual to administer the same medicine and food to men’s bodies, but a difference is made depending on their condition of health or infirmity, so, too, are souls treated with varying instruction and guidance.”<sup>19</sup> This concept will be further drawn out in the discussion to come.

Much can be gained by studying the work of Gregory the Great, for he brought nuance to the work of those before him by adapting the Christian faith to the rise of contemporary philosophy and psychology, showing that the philosophers of his time were not saying anything new, but rather stumbling on the foundational truth of how humans made in the image of God function.

The work of the early church greatly impacted the medieval era, where soul care became one of the greatest emphases of the church. Eric Johnson describes this period when he writes, “The movement of the soul toward God and Christlikeness was avowedly of paramount importance, and one of the culture’s most influential classes of institutions—the monasteries—was expressly devoted to promoting such growth.”<sup>20</sup> This era was defined by a strict rule of monastic life that was guided fully by the Scriptures.

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<sup>18</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *Foundations of Soul Care*, 55.

These strict practices led to a very high view of soul care but were only focused on the spiritual development and care of the elite class of believers.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Augustine concluded that perfection was not attainable, John Cassian (360–435 AD) thought differently. McNeill explains, “Cassian finds in monasticism the ‘way of perfection’: it leads by steps of renunciation and devotion to the love that knows no fear.”<sup>22</sup> Cassian’s work was the basis for much of the monastic movement and care of the soul in the medieval era, which led to another influential leader some five hundred years later named Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153 AD). His work primarily revolved around God’s love and how Christians were to display this love to one another in daily life. Johnson states, “He believed that advancing in this love was dependent upon meditating, reading, praying, and obeying, and that only such love could fulfill the human soul.”<sup>23</sup> This served as the model of soul care for five hundred more years until the early sixteenth century.

### **Key Truths on Soul Care from the Early Church and Medieval Period**

There are many key truths concerning soul care that can be gleaned from the early church fathers and the medieval period that can be applied to our modern era. First, soul care is a fundamentally biblical practice that is plainly laid out in Scripture and carried forward from the apostles to the church fathers. This is seen by the fathers’ commitment to the nourishment of the souls of their people. They held a deep concern that all of their people had the right theology to adequately speak the truth to themselves in times of oppression and encounters with sin.

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *Foundations of Soul Care*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Foundations of Soul Care*, 56.

The second key truth is that the Bible is sufficient for all problems of life and soul care in any era. As seen in the works of the theologians previously mentioned, it can be seen that a proper knowledge of Scripture was sufficient for them to encourage any troubled soul.

The third truth is that soul care is not an individual task, but a task that the pastor must lead the entire church body in if he is to properly care for his sheep. If the pastor is not leading the sheep in the spiritual edification of the Holy Spirit, then the individual will likely succumb to the outside humanistic philosophies of their day.

The fourth truth the church fathers show is the importance of nuance and application of Scripture in order to meet the people where they are, explain it to them plainly, and help them to grow unto Christ. Cold, rigid exhortation was not going to be an effective means of change. Following in the footsteps of Paul, the church fathers show that soul care must be wrapped in grace and peace with a genuine love for the congregation, for this is loving the church as Christ loves us. These forerunners of soul care mentioned above laid the groundwork for those to follow them, for the church was about to fall into a tumultuous time of disunity, abuse of power, and misaligned theology. Thankfully, God raised up men to carry out a Reformation that directly addressed the improper use of soul care.

### **The Reformation, Puritan, and Princeton Approach to Soul Care**

The model of soul care from the previous centuries eventually became distorted by the Roman Catholic Church, as they saw that the disturbed soul was one that was willing to give anything to be cleansed. Among their many sacrilegious practices was the selling of indulgences, which would give those who were distressed over their sin an apparent remission of the punishment that was due to them in purgatory. This was not the only form of corruption, as most historical accounts display gross negligence, ignorance,

absenteeism, and sexual immorality among the clergy.<sup>24</sup> Tim Dowley writes, “The political writer Machiavelli said that the nearer one got to Rome the more corruption one found; and in 1510—seven years before his public protest—Luther was shocked by what he saw when he visited the holy city.”<sup>25</sup> It was this visit that led Martin Luther (AD 1483–1546) to the conclusion that the Catholic Church’s theology had to be called into question and its magisterial authority returned to Scripture, as they were exploiting souls for worldly luxury under the pretense of Christ’s name. Where the Catholic Church was abusing the practice of *metanoia* by saying that a person’s true change only came through penitence, Luther argued that according to Scripture *metanoia* rather involves “a change in our heart and our love in response to God’s grace.”<sup>26</sup> From a pastoral care perspective, this change in thinking realigns the idea and practice of soul care as a work of the Holy Spirit guided by a genuine and faithful Christian leader, not an act that is to be exclusively distributed out from the church clergy by way of penitence and indulgence.

Luther did not come to this conclusion easily, for before he came to understand the scriptural doctrine of grace, Luther himself was a man riddled with fear of eternal separation from God. Bob Kellemen states, “Before he came under the influence of the cross, Luther lived life as a man terrified that he would never find peace with God because his God was not a God of peace. Luther lived with a constant sense of guilt and dread in the face of a terrifying, angry, and unforgiving God.”<sup>27</sup> Kellemen uses Luther’s life without the cross as a picture of the need for counseling under the cross. This is

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<sup>24</sup> Tim Dowley, ed., *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 294.

<sup>25</sup> Dowley, *History of Christianity*, 294.

<sup>26</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017), 11.

because Satan is always seeking to crop the Christ of the cross out of our salvation picture so that Christians will flee out of fear and never trust in his grace.<sup>28</sup>

Though Luther directed most of his call to reformation toward the structure of the Catholic Church and its abuse of power, he also focused on the way the Bible was to be utilized by pastors as a book of healing, seeing that it was God's Word given to the church for the care of the church amid an evil world. Kellemen explains the importance of Luther's work for pastoral care by stating, "Throughout his ministry, [he] addressed three primary areas of healing: external suffering through persecution, physical sickness, and spiritual depression."<sup>29</sup> Unlike his Roman contemporaries, Luther practiced what he taught by frequently visiting the homes of people who were oppressed, sick, and weary.<sup>30</sup> He deeply empathized with those he encountered with a desire to feel what they felt, pray what they could not pray, and intercede for them in the most Christlike way possible. Kellemen explains, "Luther believed that a sufferer often could not embrace loss unless and until another Christian shared in that loss. For Luther, support through sympathy, or compassionate commiseration, could prevent the person from retreating from life."<sup>31</sup>

McNeill details Luther's practices describing him as a "guide of souls" who "conversed in a very friendly way asking questions about the state of the sick man's body and soul," reminding everyone he visited that "God was a gracious Father and that Christ had wrought our reconciliation."<sup>32</sup> He once famously wrote to a fellow pastor, "So I pray that the Lord will make me sick in your place."<sup>33</sup> To another friend who was ill, he wrote,

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<sup>28</sup> Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 171.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 18 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 48.

“We must support one another and be supported.”<sup>34</sup> When his father was suffering, he said, “I wish to write this to you because I am anxious about your illness, that I might become a participant of your faith, temptation, consolation, and thanks to God for his holy Word.”<sup>35</sup> For Luther, ministry was pain, yet it was a necessary and glorious pain, as he fully lived out the conviction that shared sorrow was endurable sorrow.<sup>36</sup> Whether he knew it or not, Luther set a high bar for how a pastor was to tend to his flock. Thanks be to God that he utilized Luther’s ministry to begin a revival of pastoral care to be closely followed by those after him.

One major influencer who was a contemporary of Luther was Martin Bucer (AD 1491–1551). Bucer was a friend and mentor to many Reformers as his work became a foundational backbone to the reformation of pastoral care. Building on the church fathers, medieval theology, and his fellow reformers, Bucer wrote in 1538 what he called “this little book,” formally titled *Concerning the True Care of Souls*.<sup>37</sup> Purves describes his work as “an attempt to restore a proper understanding of the church of Christ with regard to order and ministry, with an especial concern for faithful pastoral care that leads to the salvation of Christ’s people.”<sup>38</sup> Purves’s description shows that Bucer did not simply relegate pastoral care to a small aspect of the pastor’s job description, rather, pastoral care was evangelism in the most enduring way. He also states, “In such a way, according to Bucer, pastoral care must have as a primary responsibility a concern for the salvation of the sinners lost and strayed who are still God’s elect.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Kellemen, *Counseling under the Cross*, 81.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 88.

Bucer took a different approach than the Catholic Church in dealing with the flock. He pointed out that it can be a dangerous thing, for both the congregation and the pastor, if all of the soul care was to fall on one man. Drawing from the work of the early church, he addresses this problem by stating, “The ancient well-ordered and apostolic churches chose their elders from people of all classes and types, as is indeed customary in the community at large, on the basis of their common sense and experience...that the need might be dealt with more easily and liberally.”<sup>40</sup> The idea of sharing the load of soul care was drawn out in the previous chapter, which highlighted Jethro’s advice to Moses in Exodus 18. The main idea that should be gleaned from this is that a pastor should properly delegate the load of soul care, but like Moses, the spiritual health of the souls of his people was still his ultimate responsibility to care for.

Like Luther, Bucer explains that the church had succumbed to a harmful practice where bishops had taken all the power to themselves. This might be an explanation of why soul care had dwindled in the Roman Catholic Church. In Bucer’s exhortation to dispense the power of the church, he was only attempting to restore the church to Scripture’s original model of soul care. He writes, “God wishes to use many in caring for his church, so it must be an evil thing when this task is restricted to a few.”<sup>41</sup>

Bucer committed most of his work towards reestablishing the proper function of church order and governance, but in this proper functioning of the church he mainly focused on how to admonish the sheep. He writes, “Those who are disorderly the Apostle tells us to warn, admonish, *nouthetein* (instruct or counsel). Those who are weak in the faith, that is, in their understanding of Christ, are to be lifted up, and not subjected to searching examination of their thoughts and consciences.”<sup>42</sup> Bucer again rewrites the

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<sup>40</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 169.



norm, as it was often a practice to interrogate and pressure those who were struggling into conformity. He instead suggests that those who struggle “must be addressed kindly and comfortingly, faithfully impressing on them the goodness of God and the salvation of Christ, so that they may recognize and believe that our dear God’s intentions towards them are entirely fatherly and faithful in all the suffering he sends them.”<sup>43</sup> Whereas people were coming to Christ out of cultural conformity to the power and reach of the Catholic Church, there were more likely people conforming out of the fear of punishment rather than the joy of salvation in Christ. This directly goes against Scripture in 1 John 4:18, where John writes, “There is no fear in love...For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” In Bucer’s mind, a well-ordered church that adheres to Scripture must have an organized structure, not a threatening top-down hierarchy, but a bottom-up congregation that holds the power to elect capable and gifted men to care for the souls and encourage the body of Christ so that they may endure the burdens to which God has called them.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the concern for healthy soul care was at the heart of the Reformation.

Bucer’s work not only led to a deeper theology of pastoral care, but it also was one of the main influences of one of the most famous reformers, John Calvin (AD 1509–1564). Calvin was a man who strove for piety in every aspect of life, though he was a warm-hearted and compassionate theologian who deeply cared about all of those under his care.<sup>45</sup> Calvin’s body of work, though not specifically focusing on soul care, embodies a theology of how one relates to himself, God, and the world around him. B.B. Warfield describes one who learns from Calvin’s work as “a man who sees God: God in nature, God in history, God in grace. Everywhere he sees God in his mighty arm, the

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<sup>43</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 169.

<sup>44</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 169.

<sup>45</sup> Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier, 2008), 183.

throbbing of his mighty heart. [He] sees God behind all phenomena and in all that occurs recognizes the hand of God, working out his will.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, if soul care is the function of helping people understand their lives in light of who God is and who they are, then Calvin’s work becomes an incredible tool to utilize for a pastor.

In the introduction to Calvin’s work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he argues that “all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>47</sup> He shows that when the two are separated, the knowledge of man will always be insufficient. He goes further, stating that “a man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, without the knowledge of God guiding the way men carry out soul care, better yet, any philosophical thought, man will always fall into darkness following a dim light of half-truths and incomplete theologies. Calvin, whether he knew it or not was providing an incredible guide for the philosophy of soul care as we will see in the next section.

Soon after the seeds of reformation had taken hold in Western Europe and the Colonies, the theological reins were taken up by the Puritans. Tim Keller draws attention to the importance of the Puritans as “the first Protestant school of Biblical Counseling,” for they clearly “rested their counseling approach on Scripture.”<sup>49</sup> Of all the subjects that the Puritans wrote on, soul care and Christian living were two of the most notable. They began to take the common understanding of soul care and Scripture and applied it to the

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today* (London: Evangelical Press, 1969), 23–24.

<sup>47</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 35.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 37.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Keller, “Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 9, no. 3 (1988): 11.

modernization of mental health, further enhancing and explaining how Scripture remains sufficient for all problems, even as the world was quickly changing around them.<sup>50</sup> Much could be said in a discussion about the contributions of the Puritans to the philosophy of soul care, but for our purposes, we will observe three men who were born within the same decade, Thomas Brooks (AD 1608–1680), John Owen (AD 1616–1683), and Richard Baxter (AD 1615–1691).

Thomas Brooks is most well-known for his work *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, where he goes to great length discussing twelve types of temptations, eight varieties of discouragement, eight kinds of depression, and four classes of spiritual pride.<sup>51</sup> He was one of the first to develop what would likely be categorized as a diagnostic manual of psychiatric diagnoses. Though Brooks's works were much more than a diagnosis—for he sought to bring encouragement and methodology to the way a pastor was to encourage, counsel, and tend to the heart of a fellow sufferer.<sup>52</sup> Keller states, “Brooks is not afraid to plumb deep for underlying motives and desires. He comforts. He takes emotional states very seriously.”<sup>53</sup> Brooks seemed to be furthering the work of Luther's model by showing that if a pastor is to truly care for his sheep, he must feel what they feel. This way when truth is offered, it can be easily applied by the sufferer, for he feels known and understood by the one offering it.

Another Puritan who saw the value in exploring underlying desires and motives of the soul was John Owen. He was deeply influenced by the work of John Calvin, as he had a profound desire to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification. Within his works, Owen sought to present a holistic view of the human

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<sup>50</sup> This will be displayed through forthcoming examples.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, Puritan Paperbacks, vol. 11 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Keller, “Puritan Resources,” 13.

<sup>53</sup> Keller, “Puritan Resources,” 20.

condition and their relationship with God, addressing the ways that each person's personality interacts with the reality of sin and sanctification.<sup>54</sup> His work *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* might be one of the most powerful and influential tools for pastors in understanding the soul of the believers. It contains his most famous quote, "Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you."<sup>55</sup> Owen held a very high view of the personal responsibility a person has in withstanding temptation, but he never intended to mean that it was a process to be taken up without God. His main idea is similar to that of Calvin, showing that one cannot mortify sin if he does not first see the wretchedness of his own sin in light of Christ's beauty, grace, and holiness.<sup>56</sup>

Owen addresses the concern of stoic Christianity, where people, and pastors, were being lackadaisical about their own sins and abusing the grace given by God. He explains,

The root of an unmortified course is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. When a man has confirmed his imagination to such an apprehension of grace and mercy as to be able, without bitterness, to swallow and digest daily sins, that man is at the very brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Neither is there a greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world than to drive such a trade. To use the blood of Christ, which is given to cleanse us, the exaltation of Christ, which is to give us repentance, the doctrine of grace, which teaches us to deny all ungodliness, to countenance sin is a rebellion that in the issue will break the bones.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore a man who claims he is a Christian yet does not understand the doctrine and the effects of sin in his own heart is more dangerous than a man who does not know God in the first place. When it comes to soul care and biblical counseling, this is one of the

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<sup>54</sup> John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 26.

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 50.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 56.

most important concepts that needs to be understood. The more sin is likened to bad habits and pardonable decompressors, the more destructive the person will become.

Owen's work speaks directly against the modern-day self-help movement, showing that when man seeks to help himself, this will only cause him to become more ingrained in his own philosophy, therefore abandoning the necessary help of the Spirit. He urges fellow believers to be very careful not to speak peace into their own hearts before God does, for he says that when "peace is spoken, if it be not attended with the detestation and abhorrency of that sin which was the wound and caused the disquietment, this is no peace of God's creating, but of our own purchasing."<sup>58</sup> Owen shows that when a man takes on the role of God in nourishing and cleansing the soul, he only makes it dirtier and further perplexes the answers of salvation. For the mortification of sin is a work of the Spirit but should be guided and taught by the church in their handling of the flock. Matthew Barrett and Michael Haykin show that on the basis of his exposition of Romans 8:13, "Owen expounds the biblical truth that mortification is both a duty and a gift. As the believer undertakes this duty, the Spirit enables him...to carry it out to the glory of God. Thus, it is not without reason that Owen can lovingly describe the Holy Spirit as 'the great beautifier of souls.'"<sup>59</sup>

Throughout his teaching, Owen mentored Richard Baxter.<sup>60</sup> Baxter was an English Puritan, statesman, and pastor who had a deep conviction of the pastor's role in soul care. He was deeply acquainted with the human condition, as he was seemingly on the brink of death from his adolescence onward. When he was fourteen, he came down with smallpox. He was then led into adulthood plagued by intestinal issues (which he attributed to eating too many stolen apples as a child), chronic eye disease, chronic pain,

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<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 121.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ*, Theologians on the Christian Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 232–33.

<sup>60</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 99.

and chronic illness.<sup>61</sup> This experience with chronic physical suffering helped him develop an understanding of how the soul interacts with the body, stating, “With very many there is a great part of the cause in distemper, weakness, and diseasedness of the body; and by it the soul is greatly disabled to any comfortable sense.”<sup>62</sup> In understanding his own suffering, he held a balanced view of the relation of body and soul. Whereas the popular view of his time was that any type of melancholy or depression was caused by sin, Baxter understood that this was not always the case. Keller comments, “Baxter recognizes that some depression is not caused by sin or a failure to handle life God’s way...But on the other hand, he recognizes a very complex relationship between the physical and the spiritual.”<sup>63</sup> Baxter’s view highlights the marriage between caring for the soul and caring for the body. If the body requires physicians for physical well-being, then the soul needs physicians for spiritual well-being. This refers back to Gregory of Nazianzus’s idea of pastors as physicians of the soul. It is often through these means that the Holy Spirit conducts the deep work of heart change and comfort as the pastor seeks to minister to the souls of his congregation.

His magnum opus is a small book called *The Reformed Pastor*, originally written in 1656. This work served as a methodology of counseling in his ministry for many years. Baxter practiced what he preached in *The Reformed Pastor* as he spent his typical week going from house to house, person to person encouraging them, teaching Scripture, catechesis, answering difficult questions, addressing misunderstandings, helping with conflict resolution, and assessing the soul-needs of his parishioners.<sup>64</sup> Baxter’s approach was not a matter of very skilled or eloquent technique. Purves states,

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<sup>61</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 99.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Baxter, “What are the Best Preservatives against Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow?” in *The Morning Exercises At Cripplegate*, vol. 3 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 264–5, quoted in Keller, “Puritan Resources” 16.

<sup>63</sup> Keller, “Puritan Resources,” 16.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *Foundations of Soul Care*, 61.

“Rather, his approach was to apply a spiritual and theological understanding of human beings to the work of the pastoral ministry, which begins with the continuing conversion of the pastor and leads to the conversion of the parishioner.”<sup>65</sup> This is an important takeaway for modern readers to understand. Baxter was not a master counselor, rather, he was simply a faithful man which made him a faithful pastor who cared deeply for the souls of those in his care. Purves concludes, “Faithful ministry is the consequence, then, of a reformed or spiritually renewed pastor.”<sup>66</sup>

Baxter was passionate about helping pastors understand the practice of faithful ministry. He states, “The object of our pastoral care is all the flock... We should know every person who belongs to our charge. For how can we take heed unto them if we do not know them? A careful shepherd looks after every individual sheep.”<sup>67</sup> Baxter knew the temptation of abdicating one’s call to being a shepherd for he understood the grueling work that God sometimes calls his shepherds into. He also has a keen awareness of the strategy of Satan, as he warns, “The devil is a greater student than you and a nimbler disputant... [he] will cheat you of your faith or innocence, and you will not know that you have lost it... You will see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself while he is offering you his bait.”<sup>68</sup> Baxter confronts pastoral burnout before the term was coined. If a pastor is to take on such a calling of shepherding his sheep, he will first need to be watchful of his own heart. Baxter gives a strong warning for all his contemporaries and those to come.

Moving into the eighteenth century, the model for pastoral care established by Baxter was carried forward by two brothers, Gilbert and William Tennent. Both were

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<sup>65</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 105.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: Updated and Abridged*, ed. Tim Cooper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 48.

<sup>68</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 38.

advocates for relational ministry within the pastoral call. Due to the nature of the American colonies, the methods of pastoring had to be adapted to account for the various parishes that one pastor would be responsible for. The Tennents adopted the practices of brief, yet deep conversations with individuals about their faith and personal struggles as most of their weeks were taken up with home visits.<sup>69</sup>

Along with the influence of the Tennent brothers, Princeton Seminary became well known for its strong emphasis on personal ministry and the care of souls. The seminary's first professor, Archibald Alexander, became the president of Princeton in 1812. In speaking about his new direction of ministry, he explains that this was largely due to his concern for pastoral care, for this "was the desires expressed by many, that they might have pastoral visits, and an opportunity of knowing their minister, I determined to begin a regular course of this kind."<sup>70</sup> Alexander was closely followed by his successor, Benjamin Warfield, who served as one of the strongest advocates of Scripture's value and authority during the onslaught of modernism.<sup>71</sup> Warfield set the stage for combat with the liberal theology that he saw encroaching upon the church, especially when it came to the field of pastoral care and the rise of psychology.<sup>72</sup>

### **Key Truths on Soul Care from the Reformers, the Puritans, and Princeton**

Many key truths may be observed from the Reformers, the Puritans, and the Princeton theologians. First, it is apparent that the concern for biblical soul care was at the heart of the early Reformation as the Catholic Church had taken too much power in

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<sup>69</sup> McNeill, *Cure of Souls*, 261.

<sup>70</sup> James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (1870; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1991), 169.

<sup>71</sup> W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1981), 97.

<sup>72</sup> Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians*, 97.



their abuses of pastoral authority. If the Reformers held such a high view of soul care, then the modern church should not hesitate to follow suit. Second, Luther served as a hero for Scriptural accessibility and authority, while also presenting the model for an empathetic and compassionate pastor. Third, Bucer revolutionized the idea of an orderly church and presented a methodology of how a pastor should tend to the sheep given to him by God. Fourth, Brooks ignited the idea of human psychology interacting with Scripture, showing how the Bible applies to the whole person, not simply the sins they commit. Fifth, Owen further nuanced the idea of how sin negatively impacts the psychology of the person, therefore further damaging the soul. He expounded upon the role of the Holy Spirit in mortifying sin, putting the flesh to death so that the fruit may take hold. Sixth, Baxter furthered the understanding of the dynamic relationship between the body and soul, showing how one impacts the other. Baxter also took the work of Bucer and directly applied it to the pastor's personal calling to take heed of his sheep, no matter the cost, dying to self and serving Christ above all else. Seventh, the Princeton theologians comprised of the Tennent brothers, Alexander, and Warfield set a course on how the church was to defend itself in the face of the new-age philosophy of modernism and the forthcoming shift to postmodernism, establishing that without a healthy view of biblical pastoral care, the church was bound to fall into ruin.

### **Soul Care from the Twentieth Century to the Present**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the philosophical shift foreshadowed by the Princeton theologians began to occur and brought many new challenges to the church. As Calvin pointed out in his *Institutes*, the separation of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man will only have one result—man is now responsible for solving all the world's problems.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, man is not capable of such a task, as he is only a mere

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<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 35.

creature in another Creator's world. For when the creature takes the role of the Creator, things become complicated. Alexander took notice of this separation when it came to the Christian worldview, and more specifically to soul care. He held a high view of science, for it was man's way to explore God's world. However, he did recognize that human intellect is prone to wander from the truth. He took notice of the shift in worldviews among the students at Princeton, stating, "The idea of God, distinct from the world, and from whom nature derives all its powers, seems to have no place in their philosophy."<sup>74</sup> As the cultural shift was taking root in the Western world, people began to look for alternatives to pastoral care, and just at that time, science began turning its attention to the soul.

Through this shift came the rise of the modern view of self. Though it was not a popular practice to teach on self-love, Brooks Holifield states, "In Protestant theory...there was a widespread acceptance of the idea of self-love, and even an expansion of that idea in the direction of 'self-culture.'"<sup>75</sup> A major influence in this shift was Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud who emerged in the late 1800s and contributed to the field of psychology until the late 1930s. Freud describes the reality of a person who is suffering and seeking soul care, but in his description, the helper is neither a pastor nor a doctor—but a psychoanalyst. He writes, "Nothing takes place between them except that they talk to each other. The analyst makes use of no instruments—not even for examining the patient—nor does he describe any medicines. The analyst agrees upon a fixed regular hour with the patient, gets him to talk, listens to him, talks to him in his turn, and gets him to listen."<sup>76</sup> Freud's approach was revolutionary to the therapeutic movement.

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<sup>74</sup> Archibald Alexander, quoted in *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 95.

<sup>75</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 154.

<sup>76</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1978), 6.

Instead of simply distracting the patient and talking him out of things, the approach is “to remind him that such a strong and persistent feeling must after all be based on something real, which it may perhaps be possible to discover.”<sup>77</sup> According to Freud, in psychoanalysis the therapist takes on a role similar to that of a pastor, yet, the answer to the person’s problems does not reside in Scripture—rather the answer resides in the individual himself.<sup>78</sup> Freud’s method displays exactly what Calvin warned. If there is only man, then the answer to man’s problem must reside within him. Freud’s understanding is contrary to all of the positions observed thus far in this study.

John Mackay summarizes this Freudian shift, stating that “in the Western World there have emerged a new philosophy and a new psychology of man. Neither has any use for traditional religion. Both tend however to become religious as they undertake to deal with the basic human issue.”<sup>79</sup> He observes that the up-and-coming social sciences are functionally pastoral, yet completely miss the mark.

A contemporary of Freud was Carl Jung. In his discussion of psychology and religion, he states that “Religion appears to me to be a peculiar attitude of the human mind...[with] a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors, understood to be ‘powers.’”<sup>80</sup> According to Jung, religion was a hyper-enthusiasm about anything that a man found helpful to him, but it was nothing more than that. It is this philosophy on which the entirety of secular counseling theory was built, thus ‘secular therapy’ became a metaphorical wolf in sheep’s clothing as it slowly seeped its way into the church.

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<sup>77</sup> Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> John A. Mackay, *The Presbyterian Way of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 75.

<sup>80</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), 5.

Pastors slowly began losing the battle for soul care to the ‘professionals’ as issues of the soul became inflated to a secular medical issue rather than a religious practice. Holifield shows that as early as 1897, “Americans, especially those in the schools, were turning to psychologists with great expectations.”<sup>81</sup> Some pastors even began to evangelize for social reform on the back of the psychological movement. Harry Fosdick, a Presbyterian minister in the mid-twentieth century, called out the “sheer hypocrisy for the church to say that it cares about personality as sacred and then to do nothing about social conditions that impinge on personality with frightful consequences.”<sup>82</sup> It must be stated that the position of this discussion is not that all psychology is damaging and evil, for Fosdick is not completely errant in his critique. There are certain common graces, physiological understandings, and research carried out in the name of psychology that God has used to greatly benefit society and the church. The line that needs to be drawn is when the role of the psychologist is lifted above the role of the pastor when it comes to the matters of the soul. In the defense of psychology, Fosdick makes the observation that many pastors of this age were not following the pastoral model of their predecessors.<sup>83</sup>

One psychologist and philosopher named William James hoped that psychologists and neurologists would join in a common quest for the betterment of man.<sup>84</sup> Holifield describes, “But first he had to convince the psychologists that they had misunderstood human activity, and the neurologists, that they had misinterpreted nature.”<sup>85</sup> James was not successful. This brought attention to the murkiness of the

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<sup>81</sup> Holifield, *Pastoral Care in America*, 184.

<sup>82</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper, 1956), 214–15.

<sup>83</sup> Fosdick, *The Living of These Days*, 215.

<sup>84</sup> Holifield, *Pastoral Care in America*, 184.

<sup>85</sup> Holifield, *Pastoral Care in America*, 184.

psychological movement, as they were seemingly trying to reinvent the wheel of soul care scientifically.

The modernist movement posed many theological challenges, and as the attention of theologians to shift toward biblical authenticity, the theological contributions to the practice of soul care seem to fall by the wayside. One main point of this chapter that must be understood by all pastors is the understanding that psychology is a humanistic science that is always going to be shortsighted without the understanding of God. Without the Creator at the helm of the philosophical approach, the creature will always be limited in understanding and scope.

Seward Hiltner was a notable contributor to the field of soul care during the mid-twentieth century. He attempted to integrate pastoral counseling with contemporary psychological practices by providing a methodology for soul care in his work *Pastoral Counseling*. Whereas pastors like Fosdick were evangelists for the psychological movement, Hiltner took a more subtle approach. He acknowledged the differences in understanding, stating, “Wherever there are attempts by one person to help another solve particular problems of living, there are bound to be assumptions about human nature.”<sup>86</sup> Though he took a more agnostic approach to counseling, he was quick to point out that counseling itself should not be a profession, but rather “a helping activity carried on by various professions at different levels.”<sup>87</sup> His work provided the much-needed nuance to pastoral counseling if the pastor was going to compete against modern psychology, though he may have unintentionally brought more ambiguity to what role each was serving.

Hiltner attempted to carry forth the practice of the church fathers and Reformers: that the Bible should play a vital role in soul care by showing that it serves as

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<sup>86</sup> Seward Hiltner, *Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1949), 25.

<sup>87</sup> Hiltner, *Pastoral Counseling*, 25.

a way to counsel and educate the counselee simultaneously. He was clear in showing that the use of the Bible in counseling should be particularly and skillfully applied to the person's situation. He noted, "But this is not the same thing as saying the words 'the Bible' or quoting Scripture or telling biblical stories."<sup>88</sup> The counseling process involves more than that. Ultimately, Scripture should be directly applied to the heart struggles of the person, not simply the environmental or obvious relatable stories. Even though Hiltner gives a strong argument for utilizing Scripture, his book is void of the application of his argument in a practical sense. Purves corroborates this observation, stating, "When Hiltner fills out what he intends, however, he employs psychotherapeutic, largely Rogerian, categories to interpret human experience and pastoral practice. Biblical categories immediately give way to pastoral counseling theory and drop out of sight."<sup>89</sup> Clearly, Hiltner was ahead of his time, but the integration of biblical principles with modern counseling practice still needed work.

To properly apply Scripture to the soul, there needs to be a proper understanding of the dynamic function of the heart within the person seeking counseling. The work of the Reformers shows how the heart should be the target of our counseling, but seeing the ambiguity left by Hiltner, the work of the heart in relation to counseling needs more nuance. Working from the deep theology of Herman Bavinck, Anthony Hoekema began to develop this needed nuance in the late 1940s. In commenting on psychology, he explains, "Any attempt to ascribe primacy (in the sense of sovereignty) to the intellect, as though it were the final ruler in the life of man, not only involves one in an unsound faulty psychology, but also utterly fails to do justice to the Scriptural teaching on the centrality of the heart. Such an attempt, therefore, can have no proper place in a

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<sup>88</sup> Hiltner, *Pastoral Counseling*, 202.

<sup>89</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 85.

truly Christian anthropology.”<sup>90</sup> Whereas psychology gives great importance to the thoughts and primacy of self within a man’s life, Hoekema refutes this by showing that the thoughts of man are not original, but rather arise from the heart. In explaining the dynamics of Scripture application, he states that it is “not the thoughts as such but the disposition of heart behind them is for Scripture of supreme importance.”<sup>91</sup>

In explaining the dynamics of the heart, Hoekema explains, “The soul is the subject of life, whereas the heart is the central and innermost organ of the soul... As such the heart is the organ of thinking, the organ of willing, and the seat of emotions.”<sup>92</sup> This was the needed retort against the Freudian theology of the id, ego, and superego. Though Freud’s insight gives clarity to the functions of the heart, Hoekema simply applied the philosophy to Scripture. The heart is what determines a man’s life, for it is the source of the drives, capacities, emotions, and motivations that underlie all human activity. It was a reiteration of what James stated in James 4:1 when he asks, “What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” This is also shown in Proverbs 23:7, “For as he calculates in his soul, so is he.”

Hoekema’s argument was helpful in giving language to the dynamics of soul care that should be carried out by the church, yet it was soon forgotten, and the psychological revolution of self began to set in. It was not until Jay Adams that the mass abdication of the pastor’s role in soul care was exposed and challenged. In his most famous work, *Competent to Counsel* (first published in 1970), Adams challenged this abdication, arguing that counseling is the work of the Holy Spirit, who uses Scripture, prayer, and God’s people to bring effective personality, behavioral, and heart change in a person. He explained that the psychological revolution of therapy was trying to fix the

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<sup>90</sup> Anthony Hoekema, “The Centrality of the Heart in Herman Bavinck’s Anthropology,” *The Bavinck Review* 11 (2020): 186.

<sup>91</sup> Hoekema, “Centrality of the Heart,” 185.

<sup>92</sup> Hoekema, “Centrality of the Heart,” 156.

wrong problem with the wrong presuppositions. He states, “The idea of sickness as the cause of personal problems vitiates all notions of human responsibility...People no longer consider themselves responsible for what they do wrong...Instead of assuming personal responsibility for their behavior, they blame society.”<sup>93</sup> He offered a similar critique as Hoekema when he writes that “Any counseling which moves Christ from that position of centrality has to the extent that it has done so ceased to be Christian.”<sup>94</sup>

It was in this work that Adams proposed the first formal definition of biblical counseling. He uses the term *nouthetic* to root his definition in Scripture.<sup>95</sup> Adams states that nouthetic counseling has three basic elements. First, *didaskō* refers to the communication of information in light of *noutheteō* which presupposes the need for change. The second element consists of verbal confrontation and discipline, and the third is understanding the purpose or motive behind the nouthetic activity.<sup>96</sup> Thus, it is understood that biblical counseling is a ministry of the Word of God focused on applying practical theology to the daily lives of people in a Christlike, interpersonal, and relational way. Adams utilizes this definition to revive pastors to the role of shepherding, following Christ’s role in Psalm 23. He writes, “By definition, a pastor cares for worn, weary, discouraged sheep. He sees to it that they find rest. The pastor, then, must take up his ministry to men in misery.”<sup>97</sup>

Adams’s critique has received much pushback from both the psychological and Christian world. Christian theoreticians and practitioners such as Larry Crabb, David

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<sup>93</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 5–6.

<sup>94</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> The term *nouthetic* refers to the uses of the Greek *noutheteō* seen in Acts 20:31; Rom 15:14; Col 1:28; 3:16.

<sup>96</sup> J. Cameron Fraser, *Developments in Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 67.



Benner, and Stanton Jones and popular publications like *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity* criticized Adams's argument with varying degrees of hostility.<sup>98</sup> This is likely because Adams began writing against the practice of integration just as it was blossoming in popularity. David Powlison, an influential voice in the modern biblical counseling movement, writes, "Adams's militant position appeared as an immediate and major threat at the very time they were getting established... He himself was aware that the book was crudely fashioned. But it hit a nerve."<sup>99</sup> It is apparent that Adams wrote his strident critique to draw attention to the exodus of soul care from church life.

David Powlison later took Adams's preliminary work on biblical counseling and softened it. Powlison describes Adams's views: "He believed that counselors needed to become caring mentors: advisory, consultive, didactic, informative, confrontive, guiding."<sup>100</sup> Powlison nuances his own understanding when he writes, "Real ministry engages the same personal and interpersonal problems that the psychotherapies address—but more deeply. It pursues hidden moral cancers that we all share, whether our symptoms are florid or mild. And any healing is our healing, one and all."<sup>101</sup>

Through this understanding, what the church had always acknowledged as soul care became formally understood as biblical counseling. In an effort led by Adams and his contemporaries, the first generation of biblical counselors was established. Through their work, biblical counseling training was formalized and began to spark a new reformation of the church when it came to soul care. Within the second generation of biblical counselors, the theology of the heart continues to be nuanced in a biblical way, and modern psychology continues to be critiqued in a winsome and more gracious way

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<sup>98</sup> Fraser, *Developments*, 9.

<sup>99</sup> David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>100</sup> Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> David Powlison, *The Pastor as Counselor: The Call for Soul Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 24.

than Adams's original work. Yet, the call of pastoral ministry is fundamentally the same—the pastor is called to be a shepherd, or as Adams says, a counselor, for if they are not ministering to the soul care needs of their people, someone else will.

### **Key Truths from the Past Century**

In the early 1900s, the historical idea of soul care was met with competition: humanistic psychology that heralded new scientific ways to help people feel better. The two fathers of this psychological movement, Freud and Jung, were deeply opposed to the involvement of the church in soul care. The irony is that Freud was a metaphysical materialist who did not believe that man possessed a soul. Jung, though not as hostile as Freud, only saw Jesus as an archetype of redemption, and a person's goal should not be healing, rather a person was only healed when he achieved individuation.<sup>102</sup> The entirety of the therapeutic movement is based on the work of these men. Thus, any Christian who is looking to them for wisdom, rather than Scripture, should not be ignorant of this. The key truth from this can be understood from Hoekema's view—a Christian cannot rely on a system of soul care that does not have Jesus at the center. Anything that mimics the Scriptural design yet does not believe in Scripture will always fall short.

Some offered an alternative approach, attempting to integrate psychological principles with pastoral counseling, yet Scriptural truths turned into platitudes and the personality and emotional state of the person overtook the need of the soul. This error was called to question by Adams, who trailblazed the path for others to follow in adding proper nuance to the integration of soul care and human psychology without succumbing to the utilization of psychological methods over biblical principles. A pastor can have an appreciation for the observation and study of human psychology,

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Ganz, *PsychoBabble: The Failure of Modern Psychology and the Biblical Alternative* (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, 2022), 31–32.

but he must not sacrifice the use of Scripture as the main tool to diagnose the condition of the heart and apply healing to the soul.

In the current day, the divide between soul care and self-care has not subsided. Carl Trueman describes the current landscape when he writes, “Today’s world is not the objectively authoritative place that it was eight hundred years ago; we think of it much more as a case of raw material that we can manipulate by our own power to our own purposes.”<sup>103</sup> This is absolutely true of the modern therapeutic movement, for the therapist has lost all control of truth and therefore the patient dictates the terms and is responsible to find himself according to his emotional appeal. Trueman continues, “There is, for sure, a deep desire in the modern West for self-expression, to perform in public in a manner consistent with that which one feels or thinks one is on the inside.”<sup>104</sup> The current age has become a society dictated by emotion rather than concrete moral truth, and it is beginning to show.

Dale Johnson shows how this culture shift has seeped into the idea of soul care stating, “The modern secular paradigm has become so dominant that it has often clouded the minds of believers to the vitality of the Scripture and the design of God’s church for the ministry of soul care.”<sup>105</sup> This is an incredibly dangerous time, as the church must have an answer. Johnson lists several consequences that happen when the church abdicates its primary duty to care for souls. First, sins are often recategorized in secular terms or outright ignored. Second, individuals lack growth and maturity in Christ. Third, the church’s overall witness is harmed and discredited as not having answers to “modern problems.” He concludes, “The church that is not characterized by true sacrificial love for

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<sup>103</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 41.

<sup>104</sup> Trueman, *Rise and Triumph*, 58.

<sup>105</sup> T. Dale Johnson Jr, *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 8.

one another will be characterized by a culture that does not reflect the gentle and compassionate heart of Christ.”<sup>106</sup>

Yet, the answer is not anything new. The psychological revolution is only catching up to what the church has been doing throughout its history, except for recently. Proponents of the modern therapeutic movement may simply want to help other people, but they do not have the right foundation or tools to adequately accomplish their goals. The utilization of soul care has been shown throughout the years and history of the church, all the way from Paul to Gregory the Great, to Luther, to Baxter, to Adams. Scripture is sufficient, yet it must be utilized in a careful, skillful, and Spirit-guided way. Serving as a conclusion to this chapter, a theoretical application of the history of soul care will be presented, as the curriculum taught in the next chapter will follow this model.

### **Application and Conclusion**

As presented by the church fathers, loving communal care should be at the forefront of a church’s mission to reach the soul. When the pastor involves himself in the lives of those he is called to care for, he further understands the souls to whom he preaches. A pastor must minister to the needs of the people without coming off as cold or uncaring about their pain. To achieve this, he must first know and understand his sheep in a loving and committed way. As Wayne Mack warns, “Hurting people may not care what you have to say if they do not see genuine compassion and involvement.”<sup>107</sup> Paul Tripp states, “Effective personal ministry begins when we confess that we have taken relationships that belong to God and used them for our own selfish purposes.”<sup>108</sup> When

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<sup>106</sup> Johnson, *Culture of Care*, 66.

<sup>107</sup> Wayne Mack, *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling: Utilizing the 8 Is to Promote True Biblical Change* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2021), 48.

<sup>108</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2002), 120.

the pastor properly understands the role of the relationship he is to have with his sheep, he can begin to ask how he can further the work of Christ in their hearts.

Second, the pastor is to draw from Scripture to know that he is not alone in caring for the soul. If he is to inspire the soul he is ministering to, he himself must first be inspired. This is seen specifically in the work of Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Baxter. If the pastor is to adequately teach the sheep what to believe, he must first model that belief in his own life. Baxter writes, “I publish to my own flock the distempers of my soul” and he warns that “you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues.”<sup>109</sup> Powlison comments, “Other people listen, learn, watch, and decide whether to tune you in or tune you out. The fact that you are not hidden is a unique aspect of your pastoral calling.”<sup>110</sup> Harold Senkbeil writes, “This daily dying to sin and rising to new life through faith in Christ is the pivotal hinge in every Christian’s life, and it’s an essential ingredient in faithful and consistent care of souls. No pastor can give to others what he himself has not received.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, there is a humility that must be displayed in a pastor’s approach to soul care. If he thinks that he will always be able to fix every problem that he faces, he will fail. Though, if he only deflects all of the problems that he faces to therapeutic professionals, then he will also fail. There must be a middle ground of the pastor properly understanding his own limitations within his calling.

Third, the pastor is to ask good questions that move past the common surface level and reveal the heart. It is through these good questions that the pastor deeply understands what is happening within the soul and is then able to interpret it instead of only preach to it. Paul David Tripp states, “The most important question to ask when

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<sup>109</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Puritan Paperbacks, vol. 14 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), 27–29.

<sup>110</sup> Powlison, *The Pastor as Counselor*, 38.

<sup>111</sup> Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 19.

examining the heart is, ‘What is functionally ruling this person’s heart in this situation?’”<sup>112</sup> As seen in the work of the Hoekema, the heart is always the target. It is where the soul conjures every action it takes, for the actions of a man will always reveal the heart. To speak truth to the heart, the pastor must first and foremost gently reveal it. Tripp continues, “We must not let ourselves become comfortable with the casual, where ministry is limited to offering general principles that would fit anyone’s story. The genius of personal ministry is that it is personal.”<sup>113</sup> As Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju put it, “Shepherds do not smell good. At least, good shepherds do not smell good. A Good shepherd identifies with stinking sheep, and the scent rubs off.”<sup>114</sup> If the pastor asks good questions that reveal the heart, he must then assiduously listen to the person to whom they are ministering and allow their scent to rub off. John Kwasny states, “When we are just listening to a person’s story, it becomes more tempting to move in quickly to try to fix the problem. Instead...we are to listen to a person’s heart in the matter.”<sup>115</sup> A pastor must hear the suffering heart within the person that is speaking, for they cannot be made into a checklist item or project. They are a soul that deserves the dignity of being heard.

Fourth, the pastor is to speak the truth in love. Powlison advises asking two questions about every person that a pastor encounters for soul care. The first question is “What is this person facing in life?” And the second question is “What does the Lord say that speaks directly into what you are facing?”<sup>116</sup> The answers to these questions will dictate how the pastor communicates truth to the soul he is caring for. Mack elaborates,

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<sup>112</sup> Tripp, *Instruments*, 71.

<sup>113</sup> Tripp, *Instruments*, 165.

<sup>114</sup> Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 23.

<sup>115</sup> John C. Kwasny, *Suffering in 3-D: Connecting the Church to Disease, Disability, and Disorder* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2019), 73.

<sup>116</sup> David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 55.

“Once we know what our counselee needs, we need to gear our instruction to his level of spiritual maturity. A huge range exists between babies in Christ and mature believers.”<sup>117</sup>

This echoes the truth that Gregory the Great was speaking in the early church, showing that Scriptural truth is applicable to every situation, but it takes a skilled practitioner to gracefully utilize it.

Fifth, the pastor is to help the suffering soul implement the truth that he has been told and come to believe it in action. This is most adequately accomplished when the person learns to abide within the church body. A shepherd simply does not leave the sheep once they have been found. There is a time for nourishment and a time for gently restoring him to the herd. Tripp states, “God created us to be dependent on each other to live righteously, just as he created us to be dependent on his revelation to interpret life accurately.”<sup>118</sup> The pastor knows that he has been faithful in his calling to care for souls when the person responds in faith, remains dependent on God’s goodness, patiently abides in suffering, and in return ministers to other hurting souls around them. This was the model of the early church; thus, it should be the model today.

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<sup>117</sup> Mack, *Effective Biblical Counseling*, 120.

<sup>118</sup> Tripp, *Instruments*, 259.

## CHAPTER 4

### TEACHING BIBLICAL COUNSELING FUNDAMENTALS

During the spring of 2024, The Owen Center offered a training series titled “Biblical Counseling Fundamentals.” The overarching goal of this project was to inform, equip, and encourage church leaders and members to practice biblical counseling in the Auburn, Alabama, community. The goal of this chapter is to showcase the method of teaching, the content of the course, and the reception of the community. The target audience of the class consisted of pastors, elders, deacons, and lay ministry leaders who shared the desire to implement biblical counseling within their church context. The course was five weeks long, spanning February 15th to March 14th. Each class period was two hours long with an optional time of questions and answers for thirty minutes at the end of every class. The rest of this chapter will be a description of this process, beginning with those who participated.

#### **Participants**

A total of thirty-four individuals participated in the class. At the conception of this project, it was expected that the class would only be open to pastors and ministry leaders. As word spread about the class, there was much more interest from laypeople than originally expected, so the requirements for attending were opened so that anyone interested in growing in the knowledge and skill of biblical counseling could attend.

The average age of the participants was 37, with 60 percent of them being under the age of 40. The participants’ occupations ranged from pastors, elders, deacons, missionaries, schoolteachers, seminary students, and others who are currently involved in discipleship ministries within their churches. Overall, 60 percent of the participants listed



some type of ministry position as their occupation. This included six participants who were in full-time pastoral ministry, six participants serving as overseas missionaries, and ten participants currently enrolled in seminary to become pastors. Most participants reported that they had little to no knowledge about biblical counseling before the class. It also became apparent throughout the first session that many attendees also had no theological training in their background. Because of this, some of the material was adapted to be more palatable for all attending. There were also two Licensed Professional Counselors attending. There were 5 of the 34 participants who began attending the project during the third class. The pre-survey was not given to those participants to protect the integrity of the results. The post-surveys reflect only those who either attended all five in-person class sessions or attended at least three classes in person and watched the video recordings of the missed classes provided afterward. The table below shows that of the 34 initial participants, 21 of them met the attendance requirement to participate in the post-survey.

Table 1. Participant involvement

Total Number of Participants	Participants who attended entirely in person	Participants who attended at least 3 classes in person	Participants who attended at least two classes in person	Pre-Surveys completed	Post-Surveys completed
34	17	9	8	29	21

### Training Curriculum

Once the curriculum material was completed, it was distributed to the expert panel.<sup>1</sup> The panel consisted of experts with doctoral degrees in biblical counseling. Some

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<sup>1</sup> The list of experts that made up the panel can be found in chapter 1.

are in vocational counseling ministry, while others are active seminary professors of biblical counseling. They each have extensive experience in teaching and training people in biblical counseling and are highly credentialed. Accompanying the curriculum was a rubric that they utilized to score the curriculum from one to four in different categories, including biblical faithfulness, scope, methodology, and practicality. This rubric is found in appendix 2.

The average expert score in all categories of the rubric was 3.75 out of 4. The primary feedback from the expert panel consisted of deepening some areas of the material, the addition of specific biblical references for certain topics, the inclusion of case studies, and minor adjustments to the arrangement of the material. One expert noted, “If a person does not come out of this training without a revitalized heart for counseling, they are not breathing.” I also simplified some of the discussions on anthropology, trinitarian theology, and biblical interpretation to better suit the audience who attended the class. After considering the feedback, adjustments were appropriately made, and the curriculum was complete.

The revised structure consisted of a ten-minute case study presented by the teacher to begin each class and serve as an example to refer to throughout for application purposes. The next two hours consisted of two separate lectures with a ten-minute break between each fifty-minute session. At the end of each session, I, the teacher, made myself available to facilitate personal questions and discussions for those who desired to stay. The remainder of this chapter outlines the weekly content that was covered in each class, along with the participants’ reception of the material. The curriculum material outlines that I distributed to participants each week to facilitate notetaking during the sessions can be found in appendix 3.

## **Week 1**

### *Session 1: Introduction to Biblical Counseling*

The main emphasis of the first week of class was to introduce the idea of biblical counseling to the group of participants. As soon as all the participants arrived the pre-survey was distributed. After about ten minutes, the pre-surveys were collected. As I received each presurvey, each participant was given a number that would correspond with the post-survey so that the two surveys could be accurately compared between the beginning and end of the training. After the surveys were notated, I shared the schedule and structure of the class so that the participants could prepare their hearts for the content of each week. Once questions about the schedule were answered, the class commenced.

The question asked at the beginning of the session was, “How should people be helped with their soul problems?” After explaining the biblical view of a “soul problem,” I started working through the critical concepts of biblical counseling. We discussed concepts showing that biblical counseling must be God-centered and founded on sound theology. We then compared biblical counseling and secular therapy using biblical anthropology as the lens through which we see humanity. I utilized John Calvin’s *Institutes of The Christian Religion* as a tool to show the dangers of separating the knowledge of man from the knowledge of God and the limitations of secular psychology in a Christian worldview.<sup>2</sup>

### *Session 2: The Call to Counsel Biblically*

The second session of the first week clarified the differences between general and special revelation, the place for common grace, and how we, as Christians, are called to counsel in Scripture. Utilizing Exodus 18:13–26, Ezekiel 34, Matthew 18, Matthew 28:18–20, Ephesians 4:11–16, and Galatians 6:1–2, I showed the class how the Bible is

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

evident in its call for all Christians to serve others through relational ministry. As I talked through these passages, the goal was to help people develop a more robust theology of suffering seeing that the church must answer the call to counsel those in need. If people do not believe the church can help them with their problems, they will likely not hesitate to find a secular source to fill the gap.

## **Week 2**

### *Session 3: Sufficiency and Role of Scripture in Counseling*

The topics covered in the second week of class consisted of the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling and understanding the dynamic functions of the heart. I juxtaposed Paul's endorsement of Scripture's sufficiency in 2 Timothy 3:1–6 with problems that our culture faces that are not explicitly talked about in Scripture, such as Schizophrenia, gender dysphoria, and other psychological and medical issues. The goal was to show that even though Scripture might not explicitly name specific topics that we struggle with in our culture, we can still help others understand how their story fits into a bigger story of sin, suffering, and redemption as seen in Scripture.

I utilized Jeremy Pierre's model of using Scripture, showing that it teaches us something, it does something in us, and it can see things that we cannot.<sup>3</sup> With this model in mind, I gave principles and practices to help guide the participants as they attempt to use Scripture with wisdom. The principles given consisted of knowing the person and their context before launching into a Bible passage and knowing the proper context of the passage before you attempt to apply it to someone's life.

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Pierre, "Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?," in *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 95.

#### *Session 4: The Functions of the Heart*

Using passages such as Proverbs 4:23, 23:7, 27:19, and Luke 6:43–44, I showed how the heart comprises our beliefs, desires, and actions in the second session of the week. I then showed how Hebrews 4:12–13 describes God’s Word as the only source to examine and know what is truly in the heart. The rest of the time was spent walking through a diagram of the heart showing how when we are threatened with an unpredictable circumstance, we are exposed to a certain level of vulnerability due to the curse of sin. Then, the heart immediately reacts to this vulnerability by seeking to defend itself through the act of self-preserving (saving self) or self-annihilating (self-harm). The main emphasis of the diagram is in understanding the alternative predictable truth that Scripture gives us helps us turn from acting as our own god when our vulnerability is exposed and instead run to God, who covers our vulnerability with his promises and hope. This diagram became the primary tool that we utilized in the following three classes.

### **Week 3**

#### *Session 5: The Biblical Change Process*

The third week began with the fifth session of the curriculum focusing on the dynamics of biblical change in the context of relational ministry. First, a full recap of the dynamic functions of the heart was presented to the class in the context of a case study. The case study was an adaptation of an actual counseling situation that demonstrated the utilization of the heart chart presented in the previous class. The case study described a young male counselee who had struggled with anxiety and depression for many years. To adequately describe the process of biblical change from the helper’s point of view for this young counselee’s journey, I presented an overview of Paul Tripp’s model of “Love, Know, Speak, Do” that he discusses in his book *Instruments in the Redeemer’s*

*Hands*.<sup>4</sup> As I talked through each phase, I utilized the case study to give real-life examples of how to enter in on his level, ask good questions, and adequately speak truth into his life.

Beginning with love, I described how if we begin with truth-speaking, we are likely basing the truth we have selected on an assumption we have formed. For this truth to be received and applied by the counselee, it depends on how much trust they have in the helper. Therefore, the helper should always begin any relationship with love and humility. Following the model in Galatians 6:2–3 and 1 John 4:7–21, I explained to the class how we are to bear the burdens of those we are called into personal ministry with, loving them as Christ first loved us. Once love has been established, this allows the counselor to seek to honestly know the person by asking good questions. I explained the importance of the six classes of questions being “what, how, why, how often, where, and when” and gave examples of when they are appropriate and when specific questions might be more harmful to building a trusting relationship rather than helpful.

I then discussed how once we have shown love and gained a passport into the counselee’s life with good questions, then we can begin to speak truth with wisdom. This portion took time to help the participants understand the correct and wise use of Scripture, seeing that if Scripture is used carelessly, it can cause more harm than good. I connected this section to what I covered in week two, showing a practical application of using Scripture with a case study. I encouraged the class to ask themselves several questions: “Do you properly know the person and their context?,” “Do you properly understand the context of the Scripture passage you want to use?,” “What are the truth statements in this passage that are relevant to this person?,” “What lies and wrong beliefs does this passage expose in the person’s revealed beliefs, desires, and actions?,” “Does

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<sup>4</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2002).

this passage bring them hope?,” “Does it confront their sin?,” and “How can this passage be used to equip this person in Godly living?” Once these questions have been asked and answered, they must depend on the Holy Spirit to do the difficult work of heart change in the person’s life.

#### *Session 6: Understanding Common Issues*

After fully walking through the process of biblical change, I then applied that process to common issues that are often found in counseling relationships. I further utilized the case study to show how anxiety and depression are related, and how they often grow into anger and frustration by engraining a cynical outlook on life.

### **Week 4**

#### *Session 7: Engaging Emotions*

In the fourth week, we began talking about how to properly understand the emotions that we see in those we are trying to help. Utilizing Alasdair Groves’s and Winston Smith’s book *Untangling Emotions*, I talked about identifying, examining, and evaluating our emotions.<sup>5</sup> First, we identify the emotion that seems to be the most noticeable. Once this takes place, we examine these emotions to help us understand what the person may be valuing the most. After exposing what is being valued the most, it is then the job of the counselor to help the person evaluate these emotions to show whether or not they are holy or unhelpful to the situation. After this process has taken place, we help the person act appropriately to serve the Lord in their given situation by recognizing the values, appropriately redefining what we are feeling, and refocusing on what is holy and true. By this process, the person is able to properly assess and understand their own heart.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith, *Untangling Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

### *Session 8: Marriage and Relationships*

After further discussing emotional processing, I showed how these emotions directly relate to our interpersonal relationships. This led to an in-depth discussion of marriage and conflict. My first goal in teaching about marriage was to communicate how important it was for the marriage to be Christ-centered, for every success in biblical marriage counseling depends on this principle. The more we understand the love Christ has for his people as sinners, the more a husband and a wife will be able to understand one another and give grace to one another through sacrificial love. My second goal in teaching about marriage was to utilize Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Peter 3:1–9 by describing the importance of each spouse understanding their roles from a complementarian point of view. I also pointed out specific pitfalls that couples often fall into throughout the marriage counseling process. I displayed how it can be helpful to ask these questions in the midst of conflict: “Where am I within my biblical calling as a spouse?,” “Do I want peace, or am I fighting to be right?,” and “Am I honoring my spouse as a created image bearer, or am I taking from them only to improve my life?”

We then continued an in-depth discussion on communication and sexual intimacy. I belabored the point that most Christian couples feel very uncomfortable talking about this subject, especially when they are currently struggling with it in their marriages. I helped the class understand how when the husband and wife are aimed at Jesus, the recreational, mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual intimacy should be progressing in the right direction. Also, using that framework helps the counselor expose certain problem areas that maybe the husband and wife are missing in their marriage due to brokenness or sin.

I then juxtaposed sex inside of marriage and sex outside of marriage. I showed how sex inside of marriage is God-glorifying, spouse-affirming, self-denying, blessed, and safe, while sex outside of marriage is an abuse of what God has given to be good, spouse-denying, self-affirming, cursed, and dangerous. I then used the topic of sex to



give a brief overview of dealing with abuse and trauma, encouraging the class to be good listeners when people bring specific related topics up for discussion. I then guided how to know what they can handle through biblical encouragement and when to bring in a biblical counselor to help.

## **Week 5**

### *Session 9: The Biblical Counseling Process*

During the final two class sessions in the fifth week, I presented a broad overview of the biblical counseling process by returning to the “Love, Know, Speak, Do” model for counseling. In this class, I spent more time detailing what each stage looks like using a case study and Wayne Mack’s “Eight I’s” that he expounds in *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling*.<sup>6</sup> I showed how the category of loving a person included involvement and inspiration. The know category involves gathering inventory by asking good questions and a biblical and contextual interpretation of the gathered information. Then, the speaking category involves faithful instruction based on biblical principles and gentle inducement in showing the person new practices to implement into their life. Then, lastly, the do category includes robust implementation of the truth that has been realized and faithful integration into a sustainable lifestyle that helps the person maintain the biblical change that has taken place.

### *Session 10: Church Implementation*

This then led to the final portion of the class, where I addressed how to create a counseling ministry in their churches. I asked the class to raise their hands if they were members of a church practicing faithful biblical counseling according to the material that had been taught thus far, and no one raised their hands. I used the question and

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Mack, *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling: Utilizing the 8 Is to Promote True Biblical Change* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2021).

subsequent answer to encourage them to be the voice of encouragement in their churches by giving them several guidelines to think through in the coming weeks. The guidelines included coming up with a goal, humbly and gently approaching their pastoral staff about their desire for a counseling ministry in their church, resources for proper training of lay counselors, how to identify potential lay counselors, and general principles of counseling that they will need to know before they propose the idea to their church. After some brief discussion, the class ended with prayer, and the post-survey was administered.

### **Conclusion**

“Biblical Counseling Fundamentals” was considered a large success by all parties involved. In the beginning stages of advertising the class, I expected approximately eight people to participate. The fact that there were over thirty people who in some way participated in the class was a blessing from God. At the end of the final class, a post-survey was administered to twenty-one participants. The feedback given by the participants on the post-survey showed that the class had an overwhelmingly positive impact. Many participants have already asked when the next class will be and how they are excited to bring other members of their churches to participate.

In order to show that the goal of the project was met, a *t*-test for dependent samples was conducted, and a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-training survey scores:  $t_{(21)} = -6.351, p < .0001$  can be observed. This means that there was a significant increase in the knowledge of the participants in reference to biblical counseling directly due to the material presented in the class. The following chapter will provide a more thorough evaluation of the results of this project.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project aimed to facilitate an introductory biblical counseling class for ministry leaders in the Auburn, Alabama community. The content of the curriculum was designed to show the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling those suffering from the impacts of sin and brokenness. The content ranged over a variety of counseling topics that are commonly found within the local church with the intent of highlighting the need of churches to provide soul care for their people. Every aspect of the class was grounded in biblical foundations so that any mature Christian could utilize the tools presented in this class in their own ministry context. The methodology presented was pieced together from reputable biblical counseling sources discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4. The hope was that the class would foster a growing desire and ability for biblical counseling knowledge that would lead to a healthy unity of the body of Christ in relational ministry.

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

After seeing the outcome of the class and hearing the feedback from the participants, there was a clear growth in the belief that biblical counseling must have a role in Christian ministry, especially in the Auburn community. There was also a clear growth in the participants' confidence in being able to further apply the biblical counseling principles in their own areas of ministry. Four participants have since decided to pursue further education in biblical counseling through seminaries and certification programs recommended in the class.

In the months following the class, several participants have reached out for further resources. This included teaching opportunities within local churches for biblical

counseling training, recommendations of further biblical counseling resources, and more community-wide events. The rest of this chapter will show the link between the class implementation and the newfound desire for a biblical counseling movement in Auburn. In doing so, the original goals of the project will be evaluated, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses observed throughout.

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

The first goal of this project was to identify an audience that would benefit from learning more about biblical counseling philosophy and methodology. This goal was met, but not in the way I initially anticipated. When I began advertising and recruiting for the class participants, I began with churches that were already affiliated with The Owen Center as ministry partners. The idea was to educate the pastors and ministry leaders of the local churches who referred counselees to The Owen Center to encourage more counseling to be done inside the church. This goal originated from the problem of our local churches relying too much on The Owen Center. This became a problem when we began to see that the counseling situations referred to us from these churches consisted of issues that could be addressed, in our opinion, through everyday discipleship. Of the thirty-four participants, seventeen came from eight of our current partner churches. This shows that the original goal was effectively met. Unexpectedly, seventeen additional participants came from a local seminary called Christ Our Redeemer. The seminary is still organizing and has yet to offer any classes involving counseling training, so this class served as an introduction to biblical counseling for many of the students.

Once the target participants were identified, the second goal was to finalize the curriculum and facilitate the training course. The curriculum was finalized with feedback from the expert panel as described in chapters 1 and 4. The next stage of the project was to teach the finalized curriculum to the participants. This took place over the next five weeks in February and March of 2024.

The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the training in raising awareness and applying the basic principles of biblical counseling. As stated before, a *t*-test for dependent samples was conducted once all the post-surveys were received. In the analysis of the pre- and post-surveys, a positive, statistically significant difference was found between the two with a result of  $t_{(21)} = -6.351, p < .0001$  showing that there was a significant increase in the knowledge of the participants in reference to biblical counseling directly due to the material presented in the class. The results for the pre- and post-survey could potentially range from 20 to 120. The average pre-survey score was 86.36 (SD=9.55), and the average post-survey score was 98.70 (SD=7), which shows an average improvement of 12.34 points between the two surveys. The highest pre-survey score was 105, with the lowest pre-survey score being 64. The highest post-survey score was 107, with the lowest post-survey score being 80. These changes can be observed below in table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of total scores on pre- and post-surveys

	<i>Pre-survey</i>	<i>Post-Survey</i>	<i>Change</i>
Average score	86.36	98.70	12.34
Maximum score	105.00	107.00	2.00
Minimum score	64.00	80.00	16.00

Some of the most notable growth from the class material is displayed in certain questions of the pre- and post-survey. The change in each of the questions can be seen in table 3 below.

Table 3. Comparison of pre- and post-survey responses by question

<i>Question</i>	<i>Improvement (%)</i>	<i>Same (%)</i>	<i>Declined (%)</i>
1. Every Christian has sufficient spiritual resources to counsel a fellow believer in any situation.	72	10	18
2. Scripture commands Christians to counsel one another.	36	64	0
3. I am confident in my ability to have compassion and empathize with a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	54	46	0
4. I depend on the Holy Spirit in my counseling of others.	45	45	10
5. I am confident in my ability to provide biblical counsel to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	55	42	3
6. Prayer is one of the primary ways that God changes people's hearts.	32	54	14
7. I believe the Bible is completely sufficient and authoritative to address any non-physical problems.	45	55	0
8. I am competent in asking people the kind of questions that expose their heart, attitudes, and desires.	55	45	0
9. I know how to expose lies that a person may be believing about themselves or their circumstance.	72	18	10
10. I know how to clearly articulate the gospel so that one may be led to salvation.	40	50	10
11. I know how to ask the kind of questions that enlighten a person to what they may be contributing to their issues.	59	41	0
12. I have a biblically-based methodology to follow when counseling others.	64	32	4

<i>Question</i>	<i>Improvement (%)</i>	<i>Same (%)</i>	<i>Declined (%)</i>
13. Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a licensed professional counselor.	41	27	32
14. Secular psychological therapy can bring about lasting change.	23	45	32
15. I would recommend a friend who is struggling with sexual sin to speak with a pastor or Christian counselor.	27	59	14
16. A counselor should not develop a friendship with the people he counsels in order to remain objective.	27	50	23
17. Sin is always the ultimate source of people's problems.	36	50	14
18. The Bible gives clear instruction for how to deal with anger.	50	50	0
19. The Bible is sufficient for counseling people with PTSD and Depression.	50	40	10
20. The heart plays a large role in our everyday problems.	36	64	0

Table 3 displays the major changes in the responses to the pre- and post-surveys. Some questions showed notable improvements, such as questions 1, 18, and 19, which dealt with the sufficiency of Scripture to handle specific counseling situations. The decline in question 1 is likely due to the participant's own self-evaluation. In a qualitative data section of the post-survey, many participants expressed a growth in their confidence in the Bible's sufficiency for handling most counseling issues, but this confidence was not reflected in their own ability to counsel complex counseling cases without further training. There were also major improvements in participants' responses dealing with their capability to utilize Scripture in counseling shown in questions 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12. Another notable outcome from the course was the responses to questions 13 and 14. These were the only questions that measured the reliance on secular therapy over biblical

counseling. The decrease shows that many of the participants who felt strongly about the efficacy of secular therapy decreased their reliance on referring to a licensed therapist. This also shows that a majority of the class increased in their trust in biblical counseling. As for the decrease of 23 points on question 16, there is no clear indication for statistical explanation. It is the author's opinion that this is because I counsel in a clinical setting and some of the case studies I utilized were very intense cases. Even though deeper relationships were encouraged in the curriculum, some of the participants may have had the impression that it is unwise to create friendships with counselees.

After further analysis of the qualitative portion of the post-survey, Biblical Counseling Fundamentals had a significantly positive impact on the participants' knowledge and application of biblical counseling. Even though the course content was only intended as an introduction to biblical counseling principles, the participants' feedback gave a clear picture of a deeper understanding and desire for more educational opportunities in biblical counseling through the ministry of The Owen Center.

### **Strengths of the Project**

When considering the Biblical Counseling Fundamentals class, the strengths can be seen in the content of the course, the participants' reception and interaction with the content, the inspiration given to the participants who have continued in their own biblical counseling education, and the community created within the class itself. At the project's conception, content stood out as a conundrum due to the concern of the audience, their history with counseling, both personal and academic, and timing. After heeding the expert panel's responses, some of the material was made more accessible. The content was presented in a way that helped flow from one topic to the next, taking the participants through each stage of the counseling process with an individual. Using graphs, charts, and other teaching methods described in chapter 4, I was able to adequately communicate the principles of biblical counseling in a memorable and



accessible way.

In the post-survey's short answer section, many of the participants described a major change in their opinion about biblical counseling. They stated that their preconceived notion was that biblical counseling was too simplistic to deal with the complex issues of our modern day, but as they listened and considered the nuanced view of biblical counseling presented in the class, their view changed. Now, many participants feel more competent in their understanding of biblical counseling. As an example, two participants who were ministry leaders have since taught an adapted version of the class to their staff, and as mentioned above, four participants are looking into seminary education in biblical counseling, including one who has begun his own pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry in biblical counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Another notable strength was the community formed within the class. Among the thirty-four participants, eleven different churches were represented. At the beginning of the class, very few of the participants knew each other, but by the end of the class, many had formed friendships and made connections with mutual friends. There was much comradery formed through the course material, as many participants felt comfortable enough to share personal experiences in counseling as well as counseling issues they were currently dealing with within their churches.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The weaknesses of the project were found in three areas: the pre- and post-survey, consistency of attendance, and timing of the class. In review, the pre- and post-surveys were adequate in revealing the efficacy of the class. That said, some participants mentioned that they struggled with understanding a few of the questions and were unsure of how to answer them. Once the class was completed and the post-survey was distributed, I realized that I had cut some time from a few of the counseling topics that the survey asked about, which was revealed in the responses showing little to no change

on those particular questions.

Another weakness of the class was the consistency of class attendance. Because the class was offered during the time frame between February 15 and March 14, 2024, this proved to be a difficult time due to many participants having spring break vacation plans falling somewhere within those five weeks. This could have been avoided if I had begun the class towards the end of March, but due to my own scheduling constraints that was not possible.

Other weaknesses of the project were revealed in the time allotted for each class. In short, I realize now that I tried to fit too much into the curriculum. I oscillated between the desire for this class to be a full introduction to the philosophy of biblical counseling and wanting it to be a practical methodology class. I tried to marry the two within the course content, which usually meant I went over time in each class not leaving enough time for adequate class discussion. This was a calculated mistake that will be corrected next time. The problem was mitigated by me remaining about an hour after each class answering individual questions for those who stayed. This problem was also exacerbated by the fact that participants arrived late due to unforeseen circumstances. I would usually allow about ten to fifteen minutes before starting, which usually meant that we would go later than originally planned.

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

In thinking through what I would do differently in future Biblical Counseling Fundamentals classes, there will be much more work done on the front end of the class. In retrospect, I realized that my focus was directed toward content development rather than advertising for the class. Yes, by God's grace, there was an adequate number of participants, but there could have been much more work done by sitting with pastors before the class and helping them identify certain individuals who would be good candidates for counseling training. This would have allowed me to really focus the course

content on specific topics of counseling that most churches were facing rather than trying to give a brief survey of every topic.

Future classes will consist of content that is more specified for a targeted audience, rather than an open class to anyone who wants to attend. There will also be two levels of the class—an Introduction to Biblical Counseling and Biblical Counseling Methodology. Splitting the content into two separate courses will allow more time for each subject, while also giving more time for class discussion, practical application, and roleplay.

Another area for improvement would be trying to find a better night of the week to offer the class. Since Thursdays were the only time the venue was available, I did not have a better choice at the time. Next time I will find another venue where the class could be offered on a Monday or Tuesday night for more accessibility from the community.

### **Theological Reflections**

One objective of the course material was to combine the idea of theology and practicality when it came to using the Bible in counseling one another. It was not long into the first class that I quickly realized that many of the participants had little to no understanding of theological concepts. Due to this realization, I had to spend more time than expected drawing out specific theological ideas when it came to Scripture, anthropology, sin, prayer, and suffering. Certain questions of the pre- and post-survey showed significant improvement that can be attributed to a deeper understanding of theology in these areas such as questions 1, 2, 5, 7, 17, 18, 19, and 20. An emphasis of the class material was to explain how practical theology can help counselors better understand complex issues such as anger, PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Understanding the theology of suffering and anthropology gives the counselor a great advantage in understanding the heart of the sufferer. This understanding also helps address sinners in a

gracious and empathetic way, without excusing or justifying the sin itself. Seeing people make theological connections with a deeper understanding of biblical passages for the first time was one of the great benefits of this project.

### **Personal Reflections**

My personal goal at the conception of this project was to show others how functional and helpful the Bible can be in addressing our everyday issues of living in a broken world as sinners. I would say that it is only through God's grace that I have achieved that personal goal. That said, showing others the beauty of biblical counseling was not the only achievement of this project. After six years of counseling every day, this project helped me get a better and more robust grasp on certain conceptual models of counseling that I had not yet seen in my personal experience. My own struggles were exposed in putting together the content and then teaching it. I realized that most of what I was teaching to the participants I was re-teaching to myself as well. I noticed throughout the past two years of putting this project together that my counseling style has changed significantly for the better. Before the project, I was hyper-focused on my own ability to convey biblical change through God's Word. What this project taught me the most was how to be hyper-focused on God's ability to change people in any circumstance—even through a sinner like me.

Through my counseling experience in Auburn, I have noticed time and time again that there is a drastic need for true biblical counseling. Auburn's demographic is made up of many who call themselves Christians, but as revealed through the need for counseling, many of those who identify as Christians have no concept of applying their faith during difficult situations. The pursuit of this project was to broaden the reach of biblical counseling in the Auburn area by enabling like-minded individuals to teach our community how to deal with sin and suffering in a practical way through biblical counseling. It is my hope that this project has begun a small local movement in

developing more biblical counselors for the Auburn area, therefore bringing people closer to Christ one session at a time.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the process of this project, there have been many times where it felt nonviable. Many steps of the way, I doubted my original purpose and goals, but through the perseverance of the Holy Spirit, I can now look back on these moments with joy. There were many unexpected turns, both positive and negative, but in the end, the original goals of the project were met. I now look forward to seeing what God will do in the Auburn community with biblical counseling. As of now, there seems to be momentum for the training ministry of The Owen Center. If we can capitalize on the opportunity that has been provided for us, the hope is that many more ministry leaders in the local community become well-trained biblical counselors for the glory of God.

APPENDIX 1  
BIBLICAL COUNSELING ASSESSMENT  
PRE-SURVEY

The following instrument was the survey given to the participants at the beginning of the first class. The survey began with the “Agreement to Participate” section that informed the participants of the purpose of the class and the confidentiality standards. Twenty questions were answered using a six-point Likert scale to determine the participants’ knowledge, theological understanding, confidence, and familiarity with biblical counseling.<sup>1</sup> Ten short answer questions were also given to discover any qualitative data that might be relevant to the class’s efficacy.

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<sup>1</sup> The quantitative portion of this survey is adapted from an instrument found in Thomas Kenji Sugimura, “Equipping Members of New Life Church In Woodland Hills, California To Counsel Biblically. (DEdMin proj., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

## BIBLICAL COUNSELING ASSESSMENT PRE-SURVEY

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (or alias): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

### Agreement to Participate

The Owen Center provides Christ-centered, biblical counseling to individuals, couples, and families. Our counseling focuses on knowing, trusting, and following *Jesus Christ*, the crucified and risen Lord and Savior, the ultimate remedy for personal and relational brokenness. To fulfill the call to care for the full body of the church, The Owen Center believes that biblical counseling should be a vital part of a church ministry. To fulfill this vision, The Owen Center has developed a ten-hour training course in the basics of biblical counseling. As we seek to serve the community and local church, this course will include two surveys—administered before and after the training—to observe the effectiveness of the material.

The research is being conducted by Owen Center Staff Counselor, Rev. Braden Benson, for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project to develop the formal teaching and training ministry of The Owen Center. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Because ministry is relational, we prefer that you include your name below, rather than completing the survey anonymously. It will also aid in seeing the positive impact of the material that is taught. If you prefer to be anonymous, however, please use the same memorable alias on both the pre- and post-surveys. Even though the data will be used for research purposes, **identities, names, and specific situations will remain confidential following The Owen Center confidentiality policy found here: <https://theowencenter.com/about-us/confidentiality-privacy/>.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] I agree to participate [ ] I do not agree to participate

### Survey

**Directions:** Answer the following questions by placing a checkmark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

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

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1	Every Christian has sufficient spiritual resources to counsel a fellow believer in any situation.						
2	Scripture commands Christians to counsel one another.						

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3	I am confident in my ability to have compassion and empathize with a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.						
4	I depend upon the Holy Spirit in my counseling of others.						
5	I am confident in my ability to provide biblical counsel to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.						
6	Prayer is one of the primary ways that God changes people's hearts.						
7	I believe the Bible is completely sufficient and authoritative to address any non-physical problems.						
8	I am competent in asking people the kind of questions that expose their heart, attitudes, and desires.						
9	I know how to expose lies that a person may be believing about themselves or their circumstance.						
10	I know how to clearly articulate the gospel so that one may be led to salvation.						
11	I know how to ask the kind of questions that expose a person's heart attitudes and desires.						
12	I have a biblically-based methodology to follow when counseling others.						
13	Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a licensed professional counselor.						
14	Secular psychological therapy can bring about lasting change.						
15	I would recommend a friend who is struggling with sexual sin to speak with a pastor or Christian counselor.						
16	A counselor should not develop a friendship with the people he counsels in order to remain objective.						
17	Sin is always the ultimate source of people's problems.						
18	The Bible gives clear instruction for how to deal with anger.						
19	The Bible is sufficient for counseling people with PTSD and Depression.						



#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20	The heart plays a large role in our everyday problems.						

**Directions:** Please provide a written response to the following questions:

1. How many years have you been a Christian?
  
2. How many years have you attended a Bible-believing Church?
  
3. Are you currently serving as a ministry leader, teacher, or discipler of other believers?
  
4. What is your occupation?
  
5. Briefly define “psychological counseling.”
  
6. Briefly define “biblical counseling.”
  
7. Have you ever been trained in any kind of formal counseling? If so, briefly describe.
  
8. Have you ever received any kind of formal counseling? If so, briefly describe.
  
9. How often do people come to you for help with spiritual problems? Daily, weekly, monthly, or seldom?
  
10. Are there any topics in biblical counseling that you would like for me to spend more time on as the class progresses?

APPENDIX 2  
BIBLICAL COUNSELING CURRICULUM  
EVALUATION

The following instrument was the evaluation sent to the expert panel before the beginning of class. Once the panel had adequate time to review the curriculum and fill out the evaluation, small adjustments were made based on their feedback before the first class session.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Biblical Counseling Curriculum Evaluation</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
The content of the curriculum is hermeneutically and exegetically sound. All Scripture is properly explained and applied.					
The content of the curriculum is theologically sound in relation to general biblical counseling principles.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The curriculum sufficiently covers the basics of biblical counseling.					
The content of the curriculum adequately covers each issue it is designed to address.					
<b>Methodology</b>					
The curriculum sufficiently addresses counseling methodology in an understandable way.					
The curriculum makes use of various learning approaches such as lecture, discussion, case studies, role play, and homework.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The curriculum includes encouragement to further implement and practice biblical counseling.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better counsel others biblically.					

## APPENDIX 3

### CURRICULUM MATERIAL OUTLINE

The outlines contained in this appendix were given to each participant during the relevant class section in order to facilitate notetaking and ease of understanding in the sessions.

## Week 1

### Introduction

- 1) Expectations
- 2) Pre-Survey
- 3) Class Schedule
- 4) What is Biblical Counseling?
  - a) Key Concepts
    - i) God-centered
      - (1) 2 Corinthians 5:9
      - (2) 1 Timothy 1:5
    - ii) Theologically sound
    - iii) Rooted in biblical anthropology
    - iv) Christ-centered and redemptive
    - v) Aims at the heart
    - vi) Based on sufficiency of Scripture
    - vii) Reliant on the Holy Spirit
  - b) Common Grace and Secular Psychology
  - c) Counselor Qualifications

### Theology of Suffering and the Call to Counsel

- 1) Genesis 3
- 2) 1 Corinthians 12:24–26
- 3) The Call to Counsel Biblically
  - a) Matthew 28:18–20
  - b) Ephesians 4:11–16
  - c) Galatians 6:1–2; Matthew 18
  - d) Exodus 18:13–26
  - e) Ezekiel 34
- 4) Sufficiency and Role of Scripture in Counseling (Part 1)
  - a) 2 Timothy 3:16
  - b) Hebrew 4:12
  - c) Use of Scripture
  - d) Case Study

## Week 2

### **Sufficiency and Role of Scripture in Counseling (Part 2)**

- 1) The Power of Scripture (Jeremy Pierre)
  - a) Scripture teaches something
  - b) Scripture does something
  - c) Scripture sees something
- 2) The Use of Scripture
  - a) Know the person and their context
  - b) Know Scripture and its context
  - c) What are the truth statements in this passage that are relevant to this person?
  - d) What lies and wrong beliefs does this passage expose?
  - e) Does this passage confront sin? Does this passage bring hope?
  - f) How can this passage be used to equip this person in godly living?
  - g) Depend on the Holy Spirit

### **Introduction to The Heart**

- 1) Hebrews 4:12–13
- 2) Guiding Principles
  - a) The heart is active
  - b) Whatever rules the heart exercises influence over life and behavior
  - c) Only God's word is able to expose and judge the heart
- 3) Centrality of the Heart
  - a) Beliefs
  - b) Desires
  - c) Actions
- 4) The Heart's Response to Situational Pressures

## Week 3

### **The Process of Biblical Change**

- 1) Case Study: “Depression”
- 2) Developing a Helping Relationship
  - a) Love
    - i) 1 John 4:7–21
  - b) Know
    - i) Quality of questions
    - ii) Six classes of questions
  - c) Speak
    - i) Following the model of Christ
    - ii) Implementing a new identity
    - iii) Truth vs. lies
  - d) Do
    - i) Integrating into community

### **Understanding Common Issues**

- 1) Anxiety
  - a) Concern vs. Anxiety
  - b) Three Types of Fears
  - c) Panic Attacks
  - d) Genesis 32
- 2) Depression
  - a) Who is the Narrator?
  - b) Contributing Factors
  - c) Practical Strategies
    - i) Psalm 88; Lamentations 3:1–33
- 3) Anger
  - a) Beliefs, Desires, Actions
    - i) Genesis 4

## Week 4

### **Stewardship of Emotions**

- 1) Case Study: Cain and Abel
- 2) Emotional Processing
  - a) Identify
  - b) Examine
  - c) Evaluate
  - d) Acts
- 3) The “Three Rs”
  - a) Recognize
  - b) Redefine
  - c) Refocus
- 4) Application of Heart Dynamics

### **Marriage and Relationships**

- 1) Jesus must be at the center
- 2) A biblical understanding of love
- 3) Roles
  - a) Ephesians 5:22–33
  - b) 1 Peter 3:1–8
- 4) Conflict
  - a) Peter’s path to unity
  - b) Humility and understanding
- 5) Communication and Intimacy
  - a) Wedding Cake Diagram
- 6) Understanding Sexual Brokenness
  - a) Two categories of sex
- 7) Approaching Trauma
  - a) Trauma assaults relationships
  - b) What are we to do?
    - i) Listen
  - c) Response Chart



## Week 5

### **The Complete Biblical Counseling Process**

- 1) Love
- 2) Know
  - a) Good inventory
  - b) Thorough interpretation
- 3) Speak
  - a) Gracious instruction
  - b) Genuine inducement
- 4) Do
  - a) Implementation
  - b) Integration

### **Church Implementation**

- 1) Desire vs. Need
- 2) Steps to implementing counseling in your church
  - a) Decide on a goal
  - b) Communicate goals thoroughly
  - c) Provide adequate training
  - d) Create sustainability
- 3) Understanding Counseling Roles
- 4) Understanding Counseling Process
- 5) Understanding Counseling Costs
- 6) Understanding Counseling Confidentiality
- 7) Understanding Counseling Education and Philosophy

APPENDIX 4  
BIBLICAL COUNSELING ASSESSMENT  
POST-SURVEY

The following post-survey was given to the participants at the end of the final class session. The survey consisted of the same initial twenty questions, answered using a six-point Likert scale to determine the efficacy of the class material, the participants' understanding of biblical counseling, and their confidence in applying what they have learned. Differing from the pre-survey, the qualitative section of the post-survey consisted only of five short answer questions that allowed the participants to expand on their experience in the class while also noting certain areas of change between the pre- and post-survey.

## BIBLICAL COUNSELING ASSESSMENT POST-SURVEY

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (or alias): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

### Agreement to Participate

The Owen Center provides Christ-centered, biblical counseling to individuals, couples, and families. Our counseling focuses on knowing, trusting, and following *Jesus Christ*, the crucified and risen Lord and Savior, the ultimate remedy for personal and relational brokenness. To fulfill the call to care for the full body of the church, The Owen Center believes that biblical counseling should be a vital part of a church ministry. To fulfill this vision, The Owen Center has developed a ten-hour training course in the basics of biblical counseling. As we seek to serve the community and local church, this course will include two surveys—administered before and after the training—to observe the effectiveness of the material.

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Because ministry is relational, we prefer that you include your name below, rather than completing the survey anonymously. It will also aid in seeing the positive impact of the material that is taught. If you prefer to be anonymous, however, please use the same memorable alias on both the pre- and post-surveys. Even though the data will be used for research purposes, **identities, names, and specific situations will remain confidential following The Owen Center confidentiality policy found here: <https://theowencenter.com/about-us/confidentiality-privacy/>.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] I agree to participate [ ] I do not agree to participate

### Survey

**Directions:** Answer the following questions by placing a checkmark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

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AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

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16	A counselor should not develop a friendship with the people he counsels in order to remain objective.						
17	Sin is always the ultimate source of people's problems.						
18	The Bible gives clear instruction for how to deal with anger.						
19	The Bible is sufficient for counseling people with PTSD and Depression.						

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20	The heart plays a large role in our everyday problems.						

**Directions:** Please provide a written response to the following questions:

1. Briefly define “psychological counseling.”
  
2. Briefly define “biblical counseling.”
  
3. What is one subject discussed during this class that you found to be the most helpful?
  
4. As The Owen Center seeks to continue its training ministry, what is one area of biblical counseling that you would be interested in learning more about?
  
5. Would you like to share anything else? (Optional)

APPENDIX 5  
T-TEST RESULTS

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	86.36363636	98.72727273
Variance	91.29004329	49.06493506
Observations	21	21
Pearson Correlation	0.425614674	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t stat	-6.350572294	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000001346	
t Critical one-tail	1.720742903	
P(T<=t) two-tail	2.69195E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.079613845	

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## ABSTRACT

### TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS OF THE AUBURN, ALABAMA, COMMUNITY IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING THROUGH THE OWEN CENTER

Braden Manning Benson, DEdMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024  
Faculty Supervisor: Curtis Solomon, Ph.D.

This project strives to provide training in biblical counseling for pastors and ministry leaders in Auburn, Alabama, through The Owen Center. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context and history of The Owen Center, a biblical counseling ministry located in Auburn, Alabama, and describes the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis from Scripture supporting the biblical grounding for the need for biblical counseling within the church. Chapter 3 describes the historical evidence that supports the pastor's call to counsel biblically, as well as a theoretical basis for the approach that has been developed in recent decades. Chapter 4 describes the details of the project and the methodology used therein. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the results found in the training. The main purpose of this project is to give pastors and church leaders confidence in properly utilizing biblical counseling principles as they seek to care for their church.

## VITA

Braden Manning Benson

### EDUCATION

BS, Mississippi State University, 2015  
MDiv, Reformed Theological Seminary Charlotte, 2018  
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### ORGANIZATIONS

Association of Biblical Counselors  
Southeastern Alabama Presbytery (PCA)  
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### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Uptown Church, Charlotte, North Carolina 2015–2018  
Director of Training and Outreach, Staff Counselor, The Owen Center,  
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