

MBC Equipping Hour 2019 Biblical Counselling

In this final session of Biblical Counseling, we are going to focus on some of the common ailments which people suffer from in the church. We are going to look at some of their root causes and how one can overcome these setbacks using the Bible. It is important to understand that these issues we are going to talk about are nonorganic, meaning that there is nothing *actually* wrong with the person. There is nothing that has or would show up on any of the various scans or tests one can have through medical procedures.

If there is something that is wrong with a person (pain, dizziness, fever, fatigue, etc.) never discourage them from seeing an actual doctor and having tests done. These tests will ultimately show if there is something physically wrong or something in the spirit of the person.

Week 6: Specific Counseling Issues and how to navigate them

- There are a whole host of issues that one can be “diagnosed” with today.
 - I do not like the term diagnosed, I believe it is a bit misleading. The majority of issues you will face are nothing more than an explanation of symptoms (you are **depressed, you have emotional highs and lows, you are anxious**, etc.). The point is this, we should never treat symptoms, but look for root causes.
- This morning we are going to tackle some of the common ones today that seem to plague the church more than others. We are going to look at anxiety, worry, fear and depression, eating disorders and self-esteem issues.
- The first and most important part of counseling is information gathering. You as the counselor need to gather information as to why the person is the place they are.
 - You need to ask probing questions and listen for clues to ask further questions.
 - One of the biggest mistakes made in counseling is not actually listening to the person and formulating opinions as they are still talking.
 - This does not show love or maturity to the counselee.
 - It is important to find out if the person you is coming to you for help has been to secular counseling in search of help.
 - The reason is this important is you must know what they have been told and what they already believe to be true.
 - If they have been to a “professional” and have been told they suffer from something, it is your job to find out the *why*.
 - Why do they believe this to be true?
 - Why do they need to have this specific diagnosis?
 - What in their life has brought them to this place?
 - Did having a diagnosis bring some relief and peace?
 - Why do you think this to be true?

*I want to stress the point that *this is NOT talk therapy (psychotherapy)*. Talk therapy operates under the assumption that you need to change your behaviors (among other things) in order to “feel” happy. This is not what we do as Biblical Counselors do, we are not trying to talk people into feeling better, but to get to the root of the issues.

Talk therapy also puts the emphasis on the person finding out what is wrong with them. The counselor asks probing questions about their past, their likes, dislikes, etc. in hopes that the counselee will find something out about themselves (like their environment).

Biblical counseling talks to the person with the presupposition that the problem is sin (or sin related) and the solution is found in the pages of Scripture. *Now is when your belief in the sufficiency of Scripture is going to come out.* When faced with the toughest issues are you willing to solely rely on what the Bible says or look for something else?

As Biblical counselors, we need to have the utmost compassion for people as they are in their struggles. Paul says to the church at Corinth to remind them of where they came from in **1 Corinthians 6:11** “*Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*”

Most importantly, we need to be truthful and specific with people who are struggling. As I said before, this is to be done with love and compassion. Our desire should be to see people grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and be conformed into His image. We love people enough to not desire them to stay in their sin and live a life which is characterized by defeat.

As we look at these specific areas which people struggle with, the *putting off* and the *putting on* will become more real now.

Anxiety, Worry and Fear

- While many Christians live a peaceable and fruitful life, those same believers secretly struggle with anxiety, worry and fear. They have become acceptable in the church and these attitudes always, **ALWAYS** lead to more serious actions.
- One can say that anxiety, worry and fear are sort of a *gateway* to harbor more serious issues that will come up.
- Some key questions to ask:
 - What is it in the future that you are worrying about?
 - How is this based in fact or is it something that may not ever come to fruition?
 - What are you worried about losing the most?
 - What brings you the most joy when you have it?
 - What are your thoughts about God and how He relates to your life?
- Anxiety, worry and fear can be conquered when our thoughts are focused in the right place.¹
 - Encourage entrusting attitudes.
 - Rejoice daily that Christ is taking care of you (**Phil. 4:4**)

¹ Joel James *Counsel With Confidence* pp. 62-63

- Think rightly about God’s sovereignty, wisdom and goodness (**Rom. 8:28; Pro. 3:5; Psa. 55:22**).
- Encourage trusting actions.
 - Memorize and mediate on Scripture (**Psa. 119:165**)
 - Pray in a way that shows you actually trust God (**Phil. 4:6-7**)
 - Control your imagination, refusing to invent and dwell on speculative, worse-case scenarios. (**Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; Pro. 3:5-6**).
- 1 Peter 5:7 “...casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”
- Philippians 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Depression

- As I said about anxiety being a sort of gateway into more issues, we read in **Proverbs 12:25** “**Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.**”
 - In the NKJV it is translated “**Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.**”
 - The way the Hebrew is worded here, the anxiety is causing the depression.
 - This is not to say that it is the only cause of depression, but most cases of depression can be linked with anxiety.
 - This is the sin under the sin that you need to address. To relieve the depression, anxiety must be dealt with. If not, we are only treating the symptoms.
 - Anxiety comes upon a person when they take their eyes off the Lord and place them on their circumstances. When they see their circumstances and things not going how they planned, they start to worry and wonder what they are going to do. Realizing it is out of their hands, things like anger and depression set in.
 - Depression has been common throughout history:
 - David:
 - **Psalm 42:11 “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.”**
 - Elijah
 - **1 Kings 19:4b “It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”**
 - Job
 - **Job 3:11 “I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.”**
 - Paul
 - **2 Corinthians 1:8 “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.”**

- **2 Corinthians 2:13** “**I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.**”
 - Charles Spurgeon
 - “My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.”
 - These men (and many, many more) struggled either periodically or throughout their ministry with depression.
 - **So how did they survive their bouts with depression?**
 - Firstly, depression is caused by the reaction to an event in your life, not the event itself.² Each of these men were amid something happening to them and were emotionally reacting to it.
 - Our emotions are not our problem, they are a very good thing. They tell us when something is good or bad.
 - Emotions are like smoke detectors, they are there to warn us of something, but they themselves are not the primary problems.³ If you hear your smoke detector going off because there is a fire in the kitchen and you go and smash it with a hammer, the detector is off but the house will still burn down. We do not want to just treat the symptoms but get at the issues.
 - Secondly, they took their focus off themselves and put it where it belongs, on God. When our hope is misplaced on anything else, we will be in despair.
 - Peter says in **1 Peter 1:3** “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy *has caused us to be born again to a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**”⁴
 - Our hope as believers is always linked with Christ.
 - **Psalm 119:49** “**Remember the word to Your servant, In which You have made me hope.**”
 - **Psalm 130:5** “**I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope.**”
 - **Luke 24**, two disciples hopeless on the road to Emmaus who Jesus comforted with words from the Scriptures.
 - Our hope will be renewed when we faithfully read and understand God’s word. If we are not willing to diligently mine what God has to say, we will be in despair.
 - Third, hope is a choice that we must make. It is a matter of our will.
 - **1 Peter 1:13** “**Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, *fix your hope completely* on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**”

² Wayne Mack *Out of the Blues* p. 47

³ Wayne Mack *Biblical Counseling* p. 135

⁴ See also Col. 1:4-5, 25-27; 1 Tim. 1:1

- This is a command, to fix our hope completely on the grace which comes with Christ.
- If we are commanded to do it, God will give us the grace to accomplish it.
- Fourth, they realized the truth of **1 Corinthians 10:13** “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”⁵
 - What they faced was common to man, God is faithful and will always empower you to face what He has brought your way.

Eating Disorders/Body Image

- There are three different categories:
 - Binge Eating Disorder (Gluttony, as stated in Scripture)
 - Simply overeating and eating without restraint.
 - Bulimia Nervosa
 - Gluttony and lying, as one overeats, they then purge themselves.
 - Anorexia Nervosa
 - Starving oneself and can lead to serious medical issues.
- Two main reasons for these sinful attitudes regarding food:
 - Worship of food.⁶
 - Greed: *One more will truly satisfy me!*
 - Comfort: Finding your source of well-being in food instead of God.
 - Boredom: A thoughtless exercise.
 - Avoidance: Easier to eat than...work, clean, socialize, etc.
 - Attempting to have the right body image.⁷
 - Approximately 91% of women are unhappy with their bodies and resort to dieting to achieve their ideal body shape. Unfortunately, only 5% of women naturally possess the body type often portrayed by Americans in the media.
 - Studies show that the more reality television a young girl watches, the more likely she is to find appearance important.
 - In a survey, more than 40% of women and about 20% of men agreed they would consider cosmetic surgery in the future. The statistics remain relatively constant across gender, age, marital status, and race.

⁵ I understand the OT men did not have this NT verse, but God’s character never changes, therefore they had the same resources. As seen in Isa. 41:10; Psa. 9:9, 30:5, among many, many more.

⁶ Joel James *Counsel with Confidence* p. 89

⁷ <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-body-image>

- Students, especially women, who consume more mainstream media, place a greater importance on sexiness and overall appearance than those who do not consume as much.
- What can you do?⁸
 - Help them to realize it is their choices, not someone else's fault, they are like that. **(James 1:14)**
 - The counselee needs to realize they are in sin and repentance is needed **(Pro. 28:13)**.
 - Teach the lordship of Christ over their body and they are to serve Him, not food. Christ is a much better Lord than food **(1 Cor. 6:12)**.
 - Encourage them to eat for God's glory instead of self-focused reasons **(1 Cor. 10:31)**.
 - Expose lies they have believed that have contributed to their sin:
 - Happiness **(1 Pet. 3:3-4; Pro. 11:22)**
 - Acceptance **(Rom. 5:1)**
 - Blow off self-restraint once in a while **(2 Pet. 1:6)**

Self-Esteem

*As a result of the influence of psychology, many Christians blame virtually all of their emotional, spiritual and moral problems on low self-esteem. Such thinking is unbiblical and must be corrected because it diverts attention from the person's real problems.*⁹

- Self-esteem is an untamed monster in life of far too many people.
 - It is simply defined as *confidence in one's own worth or abilities*.¹⁰
- Here is the self-esteem cycle that makes no sense:
 - Not enough self-esteem...
 - ...people tell you that you need more, and to feel better about yourself.
 - Think too highly of yourself, your prideful and need to get knocked down.
 - *having an excessively high opinion of oneself*
 - Think even higher of yourself, you are called a narcissist.
 - *a person who has an excessive interest in or admiration of themselves*
 - One step over a narcissist, you are a sociopath
 - *Grandiose Sense of Self, never recognizing the rights of others and see their self-serving behaviors as permissible*
- **Who is the one that says you have too much or too little?** Why is it so important that everyone feels the same way all the time? How do they test for that?
 - Why do we tell someone they need to have more self-esteem when the Bible clearly states that we do not?

⁸ Joel James *Counsel with Confidence* pp. 88-89

⁹ Ibid. p. 119

¹⁰ There are dozens and dozens of various definitions and defining factors, simply put, it is purely subjective.

- Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Lastly, what about medication when Scripture *seems* not work?

- *Sin is redefined as a medical condition, and pharmaceutical remedies are employed to “solve” the problem. This approach has been especially popular for dealing with disobedient children, but it is now being employed more and more frequently with adults as well. However, the medication merely masks the sinful behavior or thinking; the heart is not changed.*¹¹
- *With depression, there is no medical proof that something is wrong with the body...there are no laboratory tests that will show there is damage or malfunction of any body tissues; thus depression is not an illness.*¹²
- *Contrary to what the public is allowed to believe, no disease called depression, manic-depression [bipolar] or schizophrenia has ever been discovered.*¹³
- These are medical doctors (MD) who study disease and treatments coming to these conclusions.
- **What about chemical imbalances?**
 - *...there is no evidence that our disturbed emotions are caused by a specific imbalance of chemicals in our brain.*¹⁴
 - *...there is **no test** to prove there is an abnormal serotonin level in the body that produces depression.*¹⁵
- The only thing that medication can do (after finding out there is nothing wrong organically like tumors, cancer, broken bones, insulin related issues) is simply ease the pain of the symptoms, but the root issues are going to be there.
- If someone is taking these drugs, do not encourage them to stop, they are extremely powerful, mind altering drugs that need to be taken care of by an MD.

Side effects of antianxiety or depression medicine:

- For the believer, it shortcuts their sanctification. God desires us to go through these times to develop our faith, trust, character, etc.
 - James 1:2-4 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

¹¹ Joel James *Counsel with Confidence* p. 44

¹² Dr. Robert Smith *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference* p. 198

¹³ Dr. Gary Almy *How Christian is Christian Counseling?* p. 293

¹⁴ Fitzpatrick & Hendrickson *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?* P. 54

¹⁵ Dr. Robert Smith *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference* p. 198

- You find your hope and joy in the medication and no longer in Christ. It was not Christ that brought you out of the mire.
 - Psalm 5:11 “But let all who take refuge in You be glad, Let them ever sing for joy; And may You shelter them, That those who love Your name may exult in You.”
- Not to mention all the various ways it alters you physically in ways that you had no problems before (weight gain, skin rashes, sleep issues, etc.).

You as a believer need to decide if God’s Word is sufficient or if man has found something to better it. Can you put-off and put-on?