

Equipping Hour: Advanced Biblical Counseling

Week 6: Putting it all Together

Introduction

- 1) Over the past 6 weeks we have been taking a deep dive into **2 Timothy 3:16-17** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
 - A) We have talked about the need for Biblical change in all our lives and how that is accomplished through the Word of God. We looked at the importance of teaching, conviction, correcting and training in righteousness using the Scriptures.
- 2) This morning, we are going to put all this together in a brief counseling session.
 - A) The goal is not to have a comprehensive study, but to hopefully show you a process and help you understand where to start and how to move towards your goal.
 - B) My personal expectation is that this will be very practical for you and help you to understand the Biblical counseling process and perhaps enrich your discipleship ministry.
- 3) We are going to look at something that is very common in the church...anger and bitterness. As we talk through this situation, try and find out if you can identify what the roots of the issue are versus the fruits.

Begin at the Beginning

- 1) Before getting into the actual counseling process, it is very important to gather as much information about the person as possible.
 - A) Because our time is limited, we are going to fill in some of that information.
 - a) Todd is a normal church goer, attending church weekly and has fairly consistent fellowship with other believers outside the church.
 - b) We have known each other for a couple of years, nothing too close, just saying hi at church and some functions, but he has decided to come to me because something has just been off for a while.

Bob: Hi Todd, I'm glad that you called and wanted to meet up. How is everything going?

Todd: Good I guess, it just seems like something has been off and some friends told me that I should come and talk with you.

Bob: Ok. That's great. Can you explain to me what you think has been off?

Todd: I don't know (*show signs of not wanting to be open...passive/aggressive...talk about how other people have been really starting to irritate you...*)

Bob: It seems that you have a lot going on. Let me ask you a couple of questions

- It is important to remember that we want questions which will prick the conscience, not accusations which will harden his heart. Our goal is for him to come to see his issues through a Biblical lens. You want to try and stay away from yes/no answers, unless you are specifically looking for that. You want to get the person to start thinking.

Bob: How has your Bible reading been as of late? (*always start with this question*)

Todd: It was really good...for a while...but for the last couple of months I've been really busy...

Bob: That's good to know. I know that we have known each other for a little while, but I have never had the pleasure of hearing your testimony, how you came to the Lord. Could you give me a quick snapshot of what that was like for you?

Todd: Sure, I grew up in a Christian home, heard the gospel all the time, went off to college and joined a ministry there. It was then that I realized I was not really saved, so I repented of my sin and was born again. Since then, I've been pretty good walking with the Lord.

Bob: Thanks Todd for sharing that with me. It helps me to get some more insight into your spiritual life. Let me ask you a follow-up question to what you said earlier. You said that you have been having some issues with some people. You said that they have been irritating you lately. Is that right?

Todd: Yes, that is what I said. (*sarcastically*)

Bob: Let me ask you this, was there a specific time that you can remember when this started to happen?

Todd: Of course I can, I'm not stupid (*sharply with attitude*) Some of the people from church were going out to lunch after the service and all walked by me and never invited me. After that, I saw some pictures where they went hiking, *to my favorite place*, and never thought to invite me. So I figure they don't want to be with me, so I am not going to try and be nice to them. Does that make sense (*sarcastically*)?

Bob: Perfect sense, thank you for your honesty. (*this rarely happens, but for the sake of time, I am speeding up the process. You may need to ask several leading questions in order to get the information that you are looking for from the person.*) Let me ask you another question, have you talked with them about this, about why they did not invite you?

Todd: Of course I did. They said that it was just a spur of the moment decision and did not see me and just took off to go out. But like I said, they walked right past me, laughing and talking. They did not want me to go, that was so obvious.

Bob: Have they tried to talk to you since then? Have they invited you to things since this incident?

Todd: Yes, but I have not done anything with them...well, I did go once to lunch, but I just sat there and did not talk at all. I wanted them to know how I was feeling.

Bob: Was that the last time you spoke with them?

Todd: They have asked since, but I know it is just because they think I am mad. What does it matter anyway, I'm okay without them.

- While there are many other questions I could ask, the picture is starting to be revealed about what is going on in Todd's heart. Some key points that you should have picked up on: not reading his Bible now, not seeking to mend the relationship, jumping to conclusions about why he was not invited, thinking that he is okay (knowing that he is not).
- Though this may seem a bit staged, this case is all too common among believers in the church. When things do not go how we want them to go, when people do not do what we want them to do, when we lose control, we get deeply offended and simply leave the offending party. By now, you should have caught that we need to talk about bitterness, forgiveness and even some pride issues. Remember, Todd said that he went out with them but was just silent and subsequently stopped interacting with them.
- Ask yourself, *where would you take Todd right now to start to teach him about this lesson?* Do you have any verses in mind that would go to help Todd start to see the Lord's teaching on forgiveness, bitterness and pride? Let's see how we can teach, convict, correct and train Todd to live a victorious Christian life.

Bob: Okay Todd, I appreciate all that you have told me. Did you bring a Bible with you?

Todd: Yeah.

Bob: Great. Turn to **Matthew 18**. We will read through **verses 21-35** in a minute. Before we get there though, I just want to encourage you a little bit. By coming here and speaking with me, it shows that you know something is just not right and you want to do something about it. It is a great first step and I want you to know that it encourages me to know that your heart is not totally hardened against the things of God. My goal is to see you grow in your knowledge of God's Word and live a life which is based upon Scripture. Practically, I desire to see your relationships restored with your friends. Does that sound good to you? Is that a goal that you can strive towards with me?

Todd: I think so...

Bob: Great. Lets read **Matthew 18:21-25**. Now Todd, as I read I want you to pay attention. I am going to ask you some questions about this text when I am done. There are 14 verses so try and pick up on the main theme as I am reading them.

Todd: I'm not a Bible scholar or anything...

Bob: I certainly am not asking for your interpretation, just listen and try to follow the story. (Read Matt. 18:21-25) What are some of the things that you picked up on?

Todd: (Just name a couple of random things...)

Bob: Did you happen to notice where the first slave's attention was? Did you realize what was occupying his mind the whole time?

Todd: He was worried about his family being sold into slavery and then wanted to get the money that was owed him. It seems that he was trying to do what was right.

- This answer is very common for people who are trying to justify their poor behavior. They don't see what they did as absolutely wrong because they think there were good motives behind it. This is poor thinking, the ends should not justify the means.

Bob: You are right about one thing, he was only thinking of himself. He was obsessing over what was owed to him. His mind was being controlled by what he thought he deserved, not what he was already forgiven. As you said also, he seemed to be worried about his family, but I think his true heart came out when he had the opportunity to show mercy, as he was shown, and rather chose to be harsh. Do you understand what I am saying?

Todd: Sure, I guess.

Bob: Great. Let me bring out some more of the ideas that Jesus presents here for us. Instead of thinking about how much he was owed, where should his thoughts have been when dealing with others who owed him?

Todd: I don't know, *sharing the gospel?* (*sarcastically...sheepishly*)

Bob: That's always a good thing to do, but in this case, it would have served him better if his mind was on what he had been forgiven. He owed the king far more than the other slaves owed him and he was forgiven. But, when it came time for his debt to come to collection, he showed no mercy. How do you think he would have acted differently if he had remembered how much he had been forgiven?

Todd: Well, he might have tried to reason with them to get some of the money he was owed. He's not the king. He's not rich, so he still has to look out for himself and his family.

- Notice here again, Todd sees that there something wrong but justifies poor actions by making excuses for why the slave acted wrongly. This most likely will be the normal thought process of people that you are going to be interacting with.

Bob: That's a good point, he certainly would not have been rich and he should look out for his family. But think about this, if he didn't have a good income, why would he be lending the money in the first place? Do you think that was a responsible decision on his part?

Also, why is it only now that he is coming to collect, if he needed the money for his family?

One more question, if it was just about getting the money for his family, why did he choke his fellow slave and then put him in prison? It seems that if it was about the money, that is a little too far.

Todd: I suppose you're right. He should have thought more about it...It does seem a little excessive.

Bob: Right, let's suppose that this slave begins to think about what he has been forgiven from his king. There is a great principle that we should not miss...*we will never have to forgive someone more than*

we have already been forgiven. You talked earlier about being forgiven for your sins, do you know what that cost?

Todd: Jesus had to die on the cross.

Bob: That's right, he had to die in order that you may live. Do you know what Jesus did to deserve to die on the cross?

Todd: Nothing right? He was a good person.

Bob: Nothing...He did it simply because He wanted to reconcile us back to God. That is how God showed His love towards us. **Romans 5:8** says **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** That means that God did not wait for you to get right, He acted first, when you were dead in sin, to reconcile us back to Him. How do you view this story from Jesus now?

Todd: Well, I see that this slave was pretty selfish. He did not realize that the king lost a lot of money by forgiving his debt. Because he was only worried about himself, he treated his fellow slaves like he thought the king was going to treat him.

- He is starting to think about things like pride, selfishness, bitterness and anger. It is important to encourage the counselee to think these things through on their own. You don't want to just tell them what's going on, but ask them. This way the Holy Spirit works as they are meditating on Scripture.
- It is at this stage, when Todd seems to understand a bit more, that I move into convicting. I can see that he is starting to personalize it more and perhaps starting to apply it more to his own life. He is putting his own situation under the lens of the Scripture that we just read.

Bob: Todd, that's great. That is exactly what I was thinking too. Now, when we think about what you told me was happening between you and your friends, how can you apply this to your own situation?

Todd: I don't know...I guess this whole time I have been thinking about myself. I just want to be included in what is going on. I feel like they just exclude me because they think its funny.

- Notice how he was still trying to make an excuse, like he did for the slave in the story.

Bob: Well, lets not get ahead of ourselves. I like what you said at the beginning, lets talk about that. You said that you have been thinking about yourself a lot, right?

Todd: Yeah, I guess I have.

Bob: Just like the forgiven slave in **Matthew 18**, what should you rather be thinking about?

Todd: I guess I should be thinking about what I have been forgiven. Like you said, Jesus did not do anything to deserve dying for me, but He still did.

Bob: Todd, that's right. Can I ask you to do me a favor as well? Would you use more definitive terms? Instead of *I guess*, it is better to say *I should have been thinking...* Deal?

Todd: Yes, I guess...I mean, yes, I'll do that.

Bob: Wonderful. Withholding forgiveness and becoming bitter towards someone is not looked favorably on in the Bible. Do you know what the Bible calls those kinds of behavior?

Todd: (with humility) No, what...sin?

Bob: Yes! That is sin to harbor unforgiveness against someone one. Listen to **Ephesians 4:31-32** “**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**” If you decide to harbor anger and bitterness towards your friends, your relationship with God is also going to be hindered. Do you understand?

Todd: (say contritely) Yes, I can see that. That is *probably*...I mean, that is why I stopped reading my Bible and then started to fall further and further away from God. All I could think about was what my friends were doing and how much they did not want to be with me. I was talking about with my co-workers too much as well.

Bob: Well Todd, I think the Lord is really working in your heart right now. This is great. What do you think, as a Christian, your next step should be?

Todd: As you said...I mean, as the Bible says, I have sinned. I need to repent.

Bob: Whom have your sinned against though?

Todd: God, first and foremost. But also my friends. I need to repent before God and seek His forgiveness. I made this issue all about me and it took over my thoughts and was controlling my actions.

- For the sake of time, we will assume that Todd has repented, knowing that he has sinned against God. Furthermore, he knows that his sins are also affecting his relationship with his friends. This is a great place to start talking about correction.

Bob: Todd, thinking back to those verses in **Ephesians 4:31-32** “**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**” How should your thoughts and actions be towards God and your friends?

Todd: I can see that I need to be kind to them. I am a Christian, just like them. I need to be able to treat them, not only how I want to be treated but also how God has treated me.

Bob: What does this look like in your daily life? Let's say that church next week, the same friends decide to go out and they don't invite you...what then?

Todd: I will not let anger come in because I know that I am not perfect. I also don't know what is going on with them. As I think about the time they did not ask me, I was actually meeting with someone. They said that they wanted to ask me, but did not want to interrupt me. So I know they were not really trying to leave me out, it just felt that way. I allowed my feelings to take over what the truth of the situation was.

- Remember what Todd said when I asked him this question before? He said that his friends just went right past him. Now, in a calmer state, the truth comes out. They did say they wanted to ask him, but they also did not want to interrupt him.
- It is important that you help sort out truth from emotions.

Bob: That is exactly what I was thinking. What are some other things you can do to reconcile with your friends?

Todd: I need to call them up and ask if we can get together. They need to know that I have been harboring bitterness towards them when they did not deserve it. I was holding them to a higher standard than I would want to be held to.

- You can start to see that Todd is reconsidering his ways in light of what the Scriptures teach. That is our goal, not that he would think like me, but that he would start to use the Scripture as the lens for his decision making process.
- Now is the time that we can start to train him on how to put-on those traits to fill the void of what he has put-off. In a real counseling situation, you may need to spend more time talking about the put-offs. If Todd's case, it may be selfishness, idolatry, anger and bitterness. These are all interrelated at some level and when you start to strip away one, the others will start to fall too.

Bob: Well Todd, we have made some great progress here. My goal for you is that you would continue to walk in victory over these sins in your life. I hope you do not want to fall back into anger and bitterness either. With that being said, it is important to put together a plan in which you are able to walk in victory over these sins. Turn in your Bible to **2 Corinthians 10:5**. Read it for me.

Todd: Read the passage...

Bob: Do you understand what Paul is saying in this verse?

Todd: Not really...something about my thoughts...

Bob: That's right, he's talking about your thoughts. Let's take this verse and apply it to your situation, the reason that you came in here to talk with me. Your friends went out after church without you, you *thought* they did so without any regard for you. Firstly, how can you apply this verse to that specific situation?

Todd: Well, I thought bad things right away that I did not know to be true. I allowed those bad things to shape my feelings and actions towards my friends. I chose to rather believe a lie than to seek out the truth.

Bob: Now you know to put those thoughts off and to do what?

Todd: When these thoughts come into my mind, I immediately ask myself if I know them to be true or just think they are true? Then I remember something I read in Philippians about thinking on things that are true, honorable, right and pure. That is where I want my mind to be, not thinking bad thoughts.

Bob: That's really good. So that means when those thoughts come in, when the next time comes around and your friends don't invite you, you need to put this into practice. Are you ready for that?

Todd: I know that there will be struggles, I know that I tend to automatically focus on myself, but I also now know that God has equipped me to do differently.

Bob: What are some steps you can take to make sure you are properly handling this? This is not going to just away. These thoughts and feelings are going to come every now and again.

Todd: Yeah, you're right. Well, I know that I need to read the Bible more. I need to be able to take my false thoughts and hold them up to the truth of Scripture. So I am going to start by reading one chapter a day.

Bob: That's good. What can you do to help yourself think good thoughts about your friends? Do you think you can sit down and make a list of the good things about them? The times they helped you, made you laugh or you guys just hung out together? I am sure that those great times far outweigh the bad times.

Todd: Yeah, I'll do that. I think...I mean, I know I need to make sure, like we talked about earlier, that I am viewing them with the same grace that God has given me.

- At this stage, it is important to make sure that there is a plan in place for them to continue training in righteousness. As you can see, Todd has started to really "get it" and the Holy Spirit is working in his heart and mind.

Obviously this is a quick case that would have happened over several meetings together. There are several things to bring up with Todd at each phase, bitterness, anger, selfishness and more. You as the Biblical counselor have to determine what is a root cause of the issue and what is a fruit that is showing. Remember, our goal is not to change behavior through modification but to see the heart change.