

MBC WOMEN'S STUDY

Biblical Counseling: The Practice of Biblical Counseling Part 1

INTRODUCTION

- Today's class is going to talk about the four things that were in your reading:
 - Your relationship with the counselee.
 - The importance of instilling hope in the counselee.
 - What it means to collect data when you meet.
 - How we can then properly interpret and apply what we have gathered from the counselee.
- This is starting the very practical section of Biblical counseling. We are going to dive into the *how* of counseling and hopefully answer questions that deal with the practical side.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COUNSELEE

- Biblical counseling is about solving people's problems. It is about discovering the causes of their problems and then applying biblical principles to those causes. Sometimes, even well-intentioned counselors err by counseling without cultivating the key element of involvement.¹

The Mechanic Approach to Counseling

- The counselor is interested only in finding out what the problem is and what the book says to do about it. Then they immediately try to fix the problem with little regard to their relationship with the counselee.
- This approach to counseling is faulty because it regards the counselee as a mechanism, while the biblical counselor is trying to help a whole *person*.
- As Mack says "Unfortunately, the counselor who does this lends validity to the criticism that biblical counselors merely "throw out Bible verses" or "shove Scripture down people's throats." As we will see later in this chapter, that kind of "biblical" counseling is patently not biblical."
- We must never dismiss someone's sin, but we must not take it head-on right off in the first meeting.
 - There are some exceptions to this statement, if in the first meeting these things come up, you should exhort the person to cut off the practice.
 1. Pornography needs to end immediately.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 101.

- 2. Adultery needs to end immediately.
- 3. Physical abuse needs to end immediately.
- All of these sins are fruit of unbiblical thinking that must be rooted out over time, but this behavior must stop immediately.
- The point is, counselors cannot allow themselves to become exclusively problem-oriented. Rather, they need to be person-oriented; then the treatment of problems that flows from that emphasis will be set in the proper context.²
 - Being person oriented also shows that you care about more than *just getting through this*. Since many of the people that you are going to see have seen others before, there is a chance they have been through the cold, standardized counseling.
 - The Lord desires a relationship with His children so we must also have the same attitude.

Involvement Through Compassion

- Here are some examples of compassion from Christ:
 - Matthew 9:13 “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
 - Matthew 9:36 “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.”
 - Matthew 14:14 “When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.”
 - Matthew 20:34 “Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.”
- The Apostle Paul talking about the Christian:
 - Colossians 3:12 “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...”
 - As a Christian, you should be *automatically* putting on a heart of compassion towards other believers and those who are in the church.
 - We must remember that first and foremost we are called to live in such a way that is glorifying to God and in accordance with His Word.
- It is important to underscore the fact that compassion does not negate consequences. Our sin *is* always going to bring consequences, that does not mean there is no compassion.

² MacArthur, *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling*, 102.

- As a counselor, we want to show love and compassion, but make sure we always keep in mind that we are dealing with a sinner who has sinned against God.

Involvement Through Respect

- **Take the counselee's problems seriously.** *Never minimize the problems presented by your counselees.* You may think, "This is so trivial. Why are they making a big deal out of it?" But while it may seem trivial to you, it is extremely important to them, or they would not be discussing it with you. When you take their problems seriously, you communicate respect. On the other hand, if you make light of their problems you will alienate them from the beginning and will remove any hope they had that you could help them.³
- **Welcome the counselee's input.** We can show respect for our counselees by asking them to evaluate the sessions and suggest improvements. We can say to them, "God has brought us together, and He not only wants to use me in your life, He also wants to use you in my life." *This also means that we must receive any negative input without becoming defensive or irritated.* We can view criticism or complaints as an opportunity to model the godly responses we want counselees to develop in their lives.⁴
- **Never make a decision based upon one side of the story.** Proverbs 18:17 "The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him." We should never be trying to take sides as with any issue that comes to you, all parties have some sort of culpability.

Involvement Through Sincerity

- 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 "But *we proved* to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God *but also our own lives*, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day *so as not to be a burden to any of you*, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."
- We must be like Paul in our counseling, having no hidden agendas or disguised motives, but openly revealing the truth about who we are (and even what we are thinking) to those we seek to help. Only then will they be able to trust us through the process.⁵
 - This, of course, does not mean that we should tell our counselees everything about ourselves or volunteer everything we are thinking at any given time. Nevertheless, a willingness to share our thoughts and experiences with them is a good indicator of the godliness of our attitudes toward them,

³ MacArthur, *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling*, 102.

⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁵ Ibid., 110.

toward ourselves, and toward God. Reluctance to be open and transparent, even when appropriate and helpful, may indicate pride and a fear of man.

- The thing to remember is that the counseling time is not about you. This is not a time where you get to share and spill all the things that have been bothering you.
- **2 Corinthians 1:3–5** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction **so that** we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction *with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”
 - This is a common verse used in counseling when talking about comfort, though sometimes it is used outside of its intended meaning.
 - It is God who comforts us in our affliction for a purpose. He does this for us to be able to comfort others in their affliction. But Paul also has a means by which we are to comfort others.
 - Paul says “...*with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*...” Notice that Paul puts the comfort back on God, not on your story of how you were comforted.
 - Understand, there is a fine line here. We are to tell of our own experience of God comforting us, but not in a way that we are the ultimate hero.
 - As Paul continues on in verse 5, he says that our *comfort is abundant through Christ*. Once again, while we want to be sincere and build a relationship with our counselee, we also want to make sure they are pointed towards Christ and not our experience.
- The important distinction here is that if the person is in sin, we do not want to take away the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Remember, part of their comfort will come to them as they come to know that they have sinned against God and are now forgiven through Christ.
- ***Be honest about your goals and agenda.*** Generally speaking, it is advisable and fitting to let counselees know from the beginning what we are trying to do and how we intend to do it. We need to be honest about our counseling methods and standards. We need to make it clear that God and His Word are our source of authority. We must let them know that we approach counseling this way because we are convinced that God’s way of describing problems, identifying their causes, and solving them is superior to any other way.⁶
 - Set the course for the counselee from day one. Let them know who you are and are not, what you expect from them and what you are going to do for them.
 - You are not someone who is going to save their marriage. You can lead them to the One who can, but after that, they are going to have to put in the work.

⁶ MacArthur, *MacArthur Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 102.

- Do now be afraid to tell people how hard the work is going to be. You do not want them to think it is going to be something they can sleep through, only to find out they must work for it.

INSTILLING HOPE IN THE COUNSELEE

- In my opinion, this needs to be done *every time you meet with the counselee*.
 - Whatever else the counselor seeks to accomplish in the life of their counselee, the responsibility to impart Christ-centered hope in each and every session is of first importance.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:14 “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”**
- We have, as one of our core, most vital jobs is to give hope every conversation to people who are in situations where they strongly need it.⁷
- God gives hope. God gives hope that change is coming—that hope is certain. The Christian faith is not an experience, it’s not a doctrine of, “Oh, just hang in there and maybe things will get better if you try hard enough, or if you wait long enough, or if you have the right beliefs in your head or emotions in your chest.” That is not what we’re saying. We’re saying we have a God who promises to make things better, to make them different.⁸

Above All...Give Hope

- Biblical change cannot take place without hope, especially in the difficult situations we face as counselors. People who have had life-shattering experiences like divorce, a death of a loved one, or a loss of a job need hope. People who have faced the same problem for a long time need hope. People who have sincerely tried to solve their problems and failed need hope. People who have compounded their initial problems with other unbiblical responses need hope. People whose problems have been wrongly described need hope, and people whose hopes have been dashed repeatedly need hope. If we want to help any of these people, we must make sure that inspiration and hope are operative elements in our counseling.⁹
- Hope is the most important theme you need to establish with the counselee. Most people who are coming to you are at a place where they believe they have no hope.
 - They may think that God is done with them or that God does not love them.
 - They may be trying to get themselves back into a right relationship with God by setting up their own standards and hopeless because they continually fail.

⁷ <https://www.ccef.org/podcast/hope/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ MacArthur, *MacArthur Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 102.

- If we are not able to offer those people who are coming to us hope, then we should be the most pitied. The matter of hope is no tertiary thing.
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13 “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”
 - This *hope* was the foundation of why Paul was encouraging the Thessalonian Christians. He did not want them to grieve like the world because they have a hope the world does not.
- As people grow in hope, they will come to realize their hope is not placed in a counselor or a system, but in the God of the universe.
 - Counselors who face a trial of any kind hope for the very best outcome and resolution. We are not surprised then to observe people of all beliefs and faith systems expressing, in some way, a longing for hope that the pain and trials of life have an answer.¹⁰
 - I like this quote because it answers the “why” question. We are able to give meaning and purpose to the trials and issues people are going through.
 - To be sure, we will never have all the answers as we are not God. But we should always be pointing people to *the* One who has all the answers for them.
 - **This is why hope that is offered in nonbiblical settings will inevitably crumble.**
- Our prayer should be the same as Paul’s for the church at Rome, **Romans 15:13 “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**
- Most of us have never really understood that Christianity is not a self-help religion meant to enable moral people to become more moral. We don’t need a self-help book; *we need a Savior*. We don’t need to get our collective act together; we need death and resurrection and the life-transforming truths of the gospel. And we don’t need them just once, at the beginning of our Christian life; we need them every moment of every day.¹¹

Rightly Placed Hope

- Not all hope is equal, and we need to be able to discern what the counselee’s hope is placed in.
 - **Matthew 7:24–27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be**

¹⁰ <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2015/05/19/the-centrality-of-hope-in-counseling-biblically/>

¹¹ Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis Johnson, *Counsel from the Cross* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 30.

like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall.”

- This may take some time or may come out right away. This is very important to assess as quickly as possible.
- For example, if the counselee is “hoping” to get over a sin because they love their spouse so much, that is wrongly placed hope.
- They are wrongly assuming their hope in their love for their spouse is going to stop them from sinning. We know it takes more than that to stop sinning.
- The Bible addresses spiritual and physical issues in an asymmetrical way. “Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). The Bible indicates the hope that in Christ, it is possible for our spiritual problems (our difficulties requiring a counseling solution) to recede. The Bible never indicates this to be the case with regard to our physical problems.¹²
 - Someone may have hope in a miracle that they will be healed and not face the impending consequences of a terminal illness.
 - While this is certainly possible, their hope should not be in the miracle but in the faithfulness and goodness of God.
 - They should be hopeful that since Christ was raised from the dead, they too will be as they have placed their faith in Him.
 - They should also be hopeful that no matter the pain which comes upon them, they are going to be able to endure with the strength of the Holy Spirit in them.
- Do not be afraid to challenge people when they come to you with false or unbiblical hope. If you do not, you are ultimately setting them up for failure.
 - You must find out the object of their hope and shepherd them in or out of it.
- Remember, any circumstance that a person is facing they are looking for hope. You know the only place they are able to look for real hope is in Christ and Christ is found in the Scriptures.
 - The substance of hope in biblical counseling, regardless of the facts and circumstances of a given case (marital infidelity, physical sickness, addiction, depression/anxiety, etc.), is the timeless, matchless, eternal word of God.
 - Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

¹² Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, *Counseling the Hard Cases* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012).

- 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.”
- Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
- “The Bible does not merely inform our counseling, as if it were simply one source of truth among several...the Bible drives our counseling.”¹³
 - This is what makes Biblical counseling Biblical and should be the counselor’s vision for God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ.
 - We are not looking for good advice in the Bible so that we can then make an “informed” decision. The Bible is driving our decisions by what it is telling us to do.
 - As many theories of secular psychology are constantly being refined, and new, even competing theories are developed, Christ and His Word remain the same.

How to Help Give Hope to a Counselee¹⁴

- Help them develop a vital relationship with God and with hope-filled people.
 - Proverbs 18:1 “He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom.”
 - Psalm 55:14 “We who had sweet fellowship together Walked in the house of God in the throng.”
 - Psalm 116:1–2 “I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live.”
- Help them focus on the attributes of God that are most relevant to the issues they may be facing.
 - If someone is facing the consequences brought about by their own sin, then direct their attention to passages that particularly reveal God as merciful. Ephesians 2:4 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...”
- Help them make the Scriptures relevant to their situation.
 - If a child is experiencing the daily onslaught of a mean classmate, minister to them the words of Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
 - Then ask your child for ways they can do good to the classmate that is being evil.
- Help them consider how often people just like us have faced similar difficulties successfully.
 - They are not the first or only person to face their difficulty.

¹³ Dr. Robert Jones, <https://www.faithlafayette.org/all/people/dr.-robert-jones>

¹⁴ Taken and adapted from <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2015/03/16/15-ways-to-give-hope-in-biblical-counseling/>

- 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.”
- Help them pray and take charge of their thoughts, talking to themselves instead of listening to themselves.
 - 2 Corinthians 10:5 “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...”
 - Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”
- Help them recognize that we as believers are free from the slavery of sin and external circumstances
 - Romans 6:17–18 “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”
- Help them identify and confess their own sin, taking responsibility for their sins and laying out a specific biblical procedure for change.
 - 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- Point them to Christ.
 - Hebrews 12:3 “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”
 - The *Him* is Jesus from verse 2, the author and perfecter of our faith.

A Reluctancy for Hope

- What do you do when the counselee thinks there is no hope?
- Hebrews 6:11–19 “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.’ And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil...”

- You have a lot here about hope. When one thinks they are out of hope or there is no hope in their situation, it is imperative that you take them to the Scriptures and properly interpret/apply what is being said.
- It is not the steady condition of hope that here is enjoined on these readers. They lack maturity. What God wants is for you to show eagerness to develop and maintain to the very end a full assurance of the Christian hope. And since he addresses each one of them, it is clear that this is something that every believer may and ought to attain. If there is no eagerness, no desire to attain it, there is something wrong with the goals and objectives of your counselee. You need to probe to discover what it is that has frustrated this very normal and natural desire.¹⁵
- A full assurance of hope should be the believer's normal disposition. We have no reason to believe that God is going to give up on us.
- Our situation may not turn out how we desire it to, but once we trust God we know that it will turn out exactly how He desires it to.
- We must continually tell the counselee that the results are up to God, but the process is up to us. We must remain faithful to His ways and let Him handle the outcome.
- Waiting for the Lord happens where there is hope and where there is encouragement and where there are promises. We must believe that things *are* going to change, but they may not be how we expect.

TAKING COUNSELEE INVENTORY: COLLECTING DATA

- **Proverbs 18:13 “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”**
- How important is collecting data...if not done right, you could bring shame upon yourself and/or your counselee.
- Your goal in collecting data is to get enough information to dig to the root of the reason that brought the counselee to you in the first place.

Riding the Brake in Counseling¹⁶

- If we are going to adequately gather data in counseling, we must develop self-control in several areas.
- First, we must develop the self-control of “riding the brake” in counseling.
 - This means that we must resist the urge to make pre-mature conclusions and give early advice. I find that beginning counselors are often so eager to give biblical answers to counselees that they do not practice the discipline of first gaining a complete picture of the situation. Though it may

¹⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude, The Christian Counselor's Commentary* (Cordova, TN: The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 54.

¹⁶ <https://thebcd.org/resources/back-to-basics-data-gathering>

seem like this practice slows counseling down significantly, it is in fact a key part of effective counseling ministry.

- Second, we must develop the self-control to structure counseling in a way that gives ample time for data gathering.
 - For example, wise counselors typically dedicate most of the time in the first session to data gathering. It may also be helpful to make the first session longer than normal so that a thorough understanding of the situation may be acquired.
- Third, we must demonstrate self-control to not rely on our intuition or experience in place of thorough data gathering.
 - In a new counseling case, it may be tempting to believe that “we’ve heard a case like this before” or to have a “sense” of what is going on. But, experience and counseling “hunches” ought to never replace the careful, wise practice of collecting information and getting to know this unique situation.

Strategies for Data Gathering¹⁷

- Biblical counselors use a multi-leveled approach to gathering information for counseling ministry. Here are five strategies to effectively gather data in counseling.
- First, use a counseling intake form.
 - Many biblical counselors use a Personal Data Inventory (PDI) or similar tool. Intake paperwork, when filled out by the counselee before the first session, gives the counselor a huge advantage in that it reveals basic information about the counselee and his situation. This saves time in counseling and allows the counselor to prepare intelligibly for the session.
- Second, learn to ask questions.
 - Much of data gathering amounts to learning the skill of asking the right questions. Biblical counselors pivot between extensive questions (questions designed to get basic information about many areas of the counselee’s life, such as family, finances, health, spiritual condition, emotions, etc.) and intensive questions (questions designed to get more in-depth information about certain areas of interest).
 - Further, wise counselors know how to ask heart-revealing questions: **“A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out”** (Proverbs 20:5).

¹⁷ <https://thebcd.org/resources/back-to-basics-data-gathering>

- A heart-revealing question is a question designed to draw out a person's motives, beliefs, thoughts, and desires. Since behavior flows from the heart (Proverbs 4:23), counselors must gain heart-level information if they are to truly help people.
- Third, craft homework assignments to gather needed data.
 - Homework in counseling consists of assignments to be completed between counseling sessions which facilitate sanctification and reinforce what is learned in counseling. Homework can also be a useful tool for gathering information.
 - For example, a person experiencing anxiety may be asked to journal incidents of anxiety throughout the week, answering basic questions such as: What provoked the anxiety? What were you thinking? What were you fearing? How did you handle it?
 - In a particularly complicated case, we might ask the counselee in a homework assignment to write out a basic timeline of events or the person's "life story."
 - Written assignments like these provide crucial information and it does not require the counselor to acquire the information in the session itself, saving valuable time.
- Fourth, observe halo data.
 - So-called "halo" data is non-verbal information that is observed in counseling.
 - Examples of halo data include a person's countenance, posture, mood, appearance, tone of voice, facial expressions, sighs, or tears. In short, we need to be looking for non-verbal information, especially as it verifies or contrasts with verbal information.
 - Halo data is not conclusive, but it should be used to ask clarifying questions and to address any incongruity between a person's words and any contrasting non-verbal information.
- Fifth, use other sources.
 - "The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him" (Pro 18:17).
 - Information that comes only from one person is not as reliable as information that is verified by others. When appropriate and with the counselee's consent, talk with family members, pastors, and close friends about your counselee's situation.
 - We are often blind to our most obvious weaknesses that are readily apparent to others (Matthew 7:3-5). Gaining multiple sources of information usually leads to counseling clarity.

Three Easy Ways to Improve Your Data Gathering

How can you improve your data gathering skills? Here are three easy ways:

- **Observe a seasoned counselor.** This could be done by observing an ACBC certified counselor in your church or area, a pastor skilled in counseling, or a video recording of a counseling session performed by a seasoned counselor. Watch. Learn. Take notes. Try it yourself.
- **Read David Powlison's article**, "X Ray Questions: Drawing out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18/1 (Fall 1999): 2-8. This material is also available in his book, *Seeing with New Eyes* (P&R, 2003).
- **Practice asking questions and listening well to get to know people.** You can do this with people at your church, in your neighborhood, or in your family. If you have trouble knowing what to ask, it may help to think about different areas of a person's life: family, health, work/school, hobbies/interests, and faith/church. Like any other skill, we only get better at asking questions by doing it.

INTERPRETING COUNSELEE DATA¹⁸

Illustrations of Interpretation

- Mark 6:45–52...Jesus walked on water and the disciples thought He was a ghost and were afraid.
- Mark 10:17–23...The rich young ruler
- Luke 10:38–41...Mary and Martha
- 2 Tim. 4:10...Why Demas left Paul
- 3 John 9–10...John speaking of Diotrephes who was prideful and a liar

The Process of Interpretation

- Take data and prayerfully compare what is going on with the standard of God's Word.
 - Compare the person's behavioral responses.
 - Compare the person's emotional responses.
 - Compare the person's thoughts, attitudes, and interpretations.
 - Compare the person's desires, values, expectations, and motivations.
- Take data and look for themes and patterns.
 - Are there typical emotional responses in certain situations?
 - Are there typical behavioral responses in certain situations?
 - Are there typical thoughts, attitudes, or interpretations?

¹⁸ Carey Hardy, *Intro and Methods of Biblical Counseling*, The Expositors Seminary.

- Are there typical expectations, desires, longings, or demands that the person has in certain situations?

Take data and make sure you are labeling and describing the problems in a biblical way.

- Use biblical words and categories.
- Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
 - See also Mark 7:21-22; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:4-11; 1 Corinthians 9-11
- Avoid psychological labels, 1 Corinthians 2:12–13 “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”
 - Personality disorder
 - Codependency
 - Dysfunctional family
 - Schizophrenia
 - Damaged emotions
 - Low self esteem
 - Unmet needs
 - Perfectionism
 - Workaholism
 - Mental illness
 - Addictions (gambling, sex, etc.)
 - Multiple personalities
 - Eating disorders

Take data and put it on the witness stand.

- What biblical categories could be used to describe the person I’m counseling? **1 Thessalonians 5:14**
- What does the person understand about biblical change? **2 Corinthians 5:17**
- What about complicating factors?
- What is the best way to approach the counselee?

- What is the counselee's greatest need?
- What does the data indicate about why the counselee has not resolved the problem?
- What is the reason the counselee has come for help at this time?
- What does the counselee expect out of counseling?
- What does the data indicate about possible organic factors?
 - We don't practice medicine or law...how is diet and exercise?

Take the data and prayerfully study it to identify what may be going on in the person's heart. (1 Jn. 2:15-17)

- Lust of the flesh—Lust of the eyes—Pride of life
- IDOLATRY (Ruling Motives = worshipping self-made gods)
- Begin formulating interpretations of the nature and causes of the person's problems.
- Use Scripture to identify the different possibilities.
- Lying—Being critical—Depression—Anxiety—Fear—Difficulty handling trials—Bizarre, weird behavior

Test the validity of your tentative interpretations.

- Review the data to see which possibilities have the least/most support.
- Pray again.
- Continue to seek more information.
- Seek input from another counselor.
- Explain your interpretation to the counselee and ask for feedback.

Having tested and proven the validity of your interpretation, go on to formulate a strategy for helping the person overcome his problems.

- Includes clarifying the issues with which you will deal.
- Includes prioritizing the order in which you will deal with these issues.
- Includes deciding the manner and method you will use in providing help to this person.