

ADULT FELLOWSHIP GROUP

BIBLICAL COUNSELING FOUNDATIONS

WEEK 5: PREPARING OUR HEARTS TO COUNSEL ONE ANOTHER

- February 22: Psychology, Christian Psychology/Integration, and Biblical Counseling at a Glance
- March 1: Theological Foundation – View of Man
- March 8: *Missionary Share – Daniel Herceg*
- March 15: Theological Foundation – View of Sin & Applying Theology to Counseling Issues
- March 22: Sanctification: The Goal and Content of Biblical Counseling
- March 29: Preparing Our Hearts to Counsel One Another
- April 5: *No AFG – Resurrection Sunday*
- April 12: The Process of Counseling: Teaching, Conviction, Correction, and Training
- April 19: Navigating Specific Counseling Issues

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- What do you think of when you hear the term *counseling*? What are the qualifications to counsel someone? What is the ultimate goal/aim? What does the process look like? What tools are needed to counsel someone?
- Counseling is the opportunity to give advice to someone who asks for it. What makes counseling different for Christians is that *our advice is centered on God's wisdom, and not our own*.
- For believers, the common vernacular used today is that of *Biblical Counseling*.
- The concept of biblical counseling is coming alongside one another with a biblical worldview that views God's word as the sufficient means of counseling, believers as competent to (and commanded to) counsel, and heart change as the ultimate goal of counseling.
- This biblical counseling class is a foundational 7-week series geared towards two main goals:
 - That each person would have an understanding of what biblical counseling is, and
 - That each person would understand the practical implications and outworkings within the church as it pertains to practicing biblical counseling.

WHO QUALIFIES AS A BIBLICAL COUNSELOR?

- As we hear the term *counseling*, and consider the many heavy burdens and often deep sin that other believers are struggling with, it is a great temptation to think that we are not qualified to help them.
- Along with this is the cultural influence of secular, professionalized counseling that has seeped into the church.
- “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. Many modern Christians view the paradigm of counseling and soul care from a secular perspective, and dismiss the Bible because it does not seem to have an equivalent structure, methods, or techniques that fit the mold of secular counseling models. So, some Christians have neglected the Scriptures altogether for soul care—giving that essential church function to secular professionals. [...] An unintended consequence is the continued professionalism of soul care, the neglect of the Scripture, and the marginalization of the church’s role to care for souls.”¹
- Notice the term he uses: *soul care*.
 - With the common vernacular of counseling, it has morphed the church’s understanding of what it is that the process of coming alongside someone, teaching and admonishing them, is meant to accomplish.
 - Biblical counseling is not meant to exist in the secular, professionalized realm. It is soul care designed by God to be accomplished by the church!
- This is why it can be preferable to refer to biblical counseling as soul care or, perhaps more fitting to our context, *one another ministry*: it is intended to be normal body life in church.
- This is the presupposition of Paul:
 - **Romans 15:14** - *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.*
 - Paul, here, is addressing the church; not those with advanced degrees, not those with letters after their name, but rather the body of believers who are living amongst one another.
 - These believers, Paul states, who are filled with goodness and knowledge, are able to admonish one another.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:14** - *We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*
 - Again, Paul is addressing believers, generally, and calling them to the task of admonishing, encouraging, and helping one another with patient soul care.

¹ T. Dale Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 8.

- **Ephesians 4:12-16** - *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the **equipping of the saints** for the work of service, **to the building up of the body of Christ** [...] but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, **causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***
 - Looking to more general exhortations, we see the care of the body on multiple levels
 - First, there is the care of souls and equipping through the word that must be done through faithful church leadership (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess 5:13; 1 Pet 5:2; Heb 13:17)
 - Second, there is a care of the body that comes from one another as we are speaking truth to one another in love, serving one another, and using our gifts for the good of the body.
 - All of this results in the **building up of the body**, emphasizing the design of the Lord for the care of the body, and its individual parts, through the church.
- So, then, to answer the initial question posed in this section: who is qualified as a biblical counselor?
 - It is born again believers, temples of the Holy Spirit, who are filled with the knowledge of God's word and a love for one another.
 - Believers are not only competent to counsel and come alongside one another, but we are also commanded to, so that the body may be built up and Christ would be formed in us (Col 1:28).
 - The body of Christ, then, is a means of grace, given by the Lord, to come alongside hurting and struggling believers, that we might bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), pointing others to Christ through the word of God.
- Important to remember, though, is that though believers are **competent** and **commanded** to counsel one another, in ourselves we are not **sufficient**. That sufficiency can only come through the word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
 - When counseling within the body of Christ, or even at the elder level, a belief in the sufficiency of Scripture will be tested. You may hear things like "*Is this all you have to offer?*" or "*What do you think I should do?*"
 - The counselor may be tempted to try and find a clever way to offer advice through their own lens, outside the bonds of Scripture.
 - God's Word, because of its source, is all that we should be relying on. This is the foundation for teaching and counseling in the church.
 - If all you have to offer is Biblical wisdom, then all you have is sufficient for the issue.
- **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.*

WHAT ARE SOME HINDERANCES TO COUNSELING ONE ANOTHER?

- Having set the need and expectation for soul care within the church, it is helpful to note the areas in our hearts that can put up roadblocks to seeking this out.
- Remember, because these are given in commands in Scripture, and because it requires being born again, it means that this is not our natural bent. Because of that, we must be aware of those hinderances in us that the enemy will use to pull us away from serving one another.

Apathy

- “*The nice thing about apathy is you don’t have to exert yourself to show you’re sincere about it.*”—Anonymous
- Apathy literally means *without feeling*. It is to have a lack of concern or interest for something or someone.
 - It is easy, if we aren’t intentionally cultivating love for one another and seeking out relationships in the body, to become uncompassionate or uncaring about the church.
 - Our indifference toward the body can cause us to look at the needs for soul care, discipleship and counseling in the church and simply not care enough to intervene.
- Subsequently the concern for others also falls away because focus has shifted from Christ and His church to self.
- **Romans 12:10-11** - *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;*

Fear

- If we are honest, all of us suffer from fear on some level. It is a sin that is common to all man (1 Cor 10:13).
- In the area of counseling and soul care, there are a number of ways that fear can prevent us from caring for one another as we should.
 - First is a fear of confrontation.
 - Rarely do we consider confrontation a good thing. In fact, we tend to avoid it at all costs.
 - However, confrontation, when done biblically, is a good and necessary thing!
 - Consider Paul’s interaction with Peter, recorded in Galatians 2:11-14:
 - Paul confronted Peter directly. Peter had been eating with Gentiles until certain Jews came, and then he shunned the Gentiles.
 - Peter did this out of fear of the response of the Jews (v. 12). It was out of fear that he was starting down the path of sin, bringing division into the church.
 - Peter’s sin was so great that Paul needed to intervene, and he went directly to Peter to address it!

- This reminds us that sin can have great consequences, and therefore, God, in His grace and mercy has given us the church as a means of loving correction
 - **Galatians 6:1** – *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*
 - **Matthew 18:15** - *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*
- Another expression of this is a fear of being ill-equipped.
 - Often, we can fear coming to someone, or coming alongside someone who is suffering, because we don't think we're equipped to handle it.
 - While there is legitimacy to this, in that we are called to give wisdom and admonition according to the word of God, it should lead us to:
 - Study the word of God so that we are ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Pet 3:15) and teach and admonish out of a life saturated with Scripture (Col 3:16)
 - Rely completely on the word of God (not our eloquence/superiority of speech) and on the Spirit of God to convict and change hearts.
 - This fear can lead to a healthy dependence on the Lord in counseling, but it shouldn't lead us to inaction.
- While we must recognize that this fear exists, we must also consider and ask ourselves, *“Do I care enough about the furtherance of the gospel and for others in the church that I am willing to be uncomfortable?”*
- Will we let fear rule us, or, when those thoughts come into our mind, will we take them captive to the obedience of Christ? (2 Cor 10:5)

Pride

- While we could tie the previous hinderances to an ultimate root of pride, as we can with all sin, we must note some other ways in which pride can prevent us from seeking out one another or cause us to do this poorly.
 - First, pride can express itself in a spirit of individualism – putting our own needs/wants above the needs of others in the church.
 - This can lead us to ask, *“If I'm looking out for others, who is looking out for me?”*
 - We are focused on *our* time, *our* needs, *our* schedules, what it costs *us*, what *we* get out of it, etc.
 - We avoid discipleship/counseling others because we're too busy or it's uncomfortable
 - Our priority becomes serving ourselves rather than Christ and His body...
 - **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.*

- We shouldn't serve the idols of comfort and ease, but we must be willing to sacrifice for the body of Christ.
- By the way, if the body is doing this for one another, then none of us will lack for care, both through the body caring for itself and ultimately through the Father's care:
 - **Ephesians 4:16** - *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*
 - **Matthew 6:33** - *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
- Second, this pride can express itself by admonishing others according to our own preferences rather than by the word of God.
 - This expression of pride may not deter us from seeking out other and/or counseling in the body, but it can lead us to do so in a way that is not profitable.
 - Rather than leading, teaching, admonishing through biblical principles, we lead with our preferences/opinions, and we make those the principles which we are admonishing others in.
 - Rebuking others in areas that offends us rather than in what offends God.
 - While we are all free to have preferences and liberty in areas that the Bible does not provide direct commands or indirect principles for, we cannot miscategorize those areas.
 - This can lead us to counsel others to be conformed to our will rather than God's will.
 - Rather, in humility of mind, we are to seek unity through the common bond of seeking and living out God's will and accepting preferences of others without condemning them.
 - **Romans 14:13, 19** - *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way [...] So then pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.*
- In either case, we are so enraptured by self that we begin to neglect the people of God and usurp the authority of the word of God.
- We are more concerned about the kingdom of self than the kingdom of God.

WHAT ARE THE NEEDED QUALITIES OF A BIBLICAL COUNSELOR?

- While Scripture is clear that believers in the body of Christ are commanded to come alongside one other, teaching, admonishing, encouraging, and helping one another, Scripture also speaks of necessary characteristics and qualities within someone that are critical to do this well.

- First, we must have a love for and knowledge of the word of God.
 - When observing those passages that speak of coming alongside one another, teaching and admonishing, those efforts toward one another are always seen as an *overflow* of our own devotion to and study of the word of God
 - **Colossians 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...*
 - **Romans 15:14** - *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.*
 - As we are filled with the word of God, that becomes the well which we draw water out of to minister to others. If that well runs dry, we have nothing to offer!
 - You cannot lead someone to a place you have never been.
 - As Ezra modeled, we must be those who set our heart to study and practice the word, and then we are filled with knowledge to teach and admonish one another (Ezra 7:10)
 - We cannot be those who seek to add or take away something from the Bible to counsel effectively.
 - Remember, the sufficiency to counsel is not rooted in us.
 - It is not in persuasive speech or the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:1-5)
 - To grow in Christlikeness, we need the wisdom of Christ in Scripture.
 - On a practical note, it may be helpful to memorize Scripture that has been particularly helpful for you, in your times of struggle, that you can encourage others with, or seek out resources that provide Scripture for counseling (e.g., *Counsel With Confidence*)
- Second, we must have a love for God's people.
 - While this may seem obvious, this is a critical factor that will motivate us to seek out one another for soul care and body life ministry.
 - This characterized Paul's ministry:
 - **Acts 20:31** - *Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*
 - **1 Thessalonians 2:7-11** – familial care (gentle as a nursing mother, exhorting/encouraging/imploring as a father) rooted in a deep affection for believers.
 - **2 Corinthians 11:28** - *Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.*
 - For believers, it is this love that serves as the sinews of the body of Christ. It is what holds us together in unity.
 - **Ephesians 4:2-3** - *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
 - **Colossians 3:14** - *Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

- **Romans 12:9-10** - *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...*
- When we consider counseling and discipleship, we must understand that it is costly.
 - Pouring out your lives for the sake of others is hard. Coming alongside others in the midst of what Spurgeon called ‘dark nights of the soul’ is difficult.
 - There is a commitment of time and energy that must be given.
- Without a deep compassion and love for the body, it can be very tempting to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others or assume that someone else can/should handle it.
- This cannot be our hearts toward one another. ***We must not see this ministry toward one another as a burden. Rather, we must be burdened for one another in love.***
- Third, we must be those who are willing to speak the truth to one another.
 - Balancing the love we have for the word of God and for one another, we must be those who are not afraid to speak truth into the lives of one another.
 - **Ephesians 4:15-16** - *...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*
 - **Colossians 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...*
 - The terms **teaching** and **admonishing** imply that we are bringing truth to bear in the lives of those we are ministering to.
 - Again, Paul modeled this in his ministry.
 - **1 Corinthians 4:14** - *I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.*
 - Paul’s desire wasn’t to hurt these believers, though out of necessity he needed to provide some harsh rebuke and admonition.
 - He loved these believers, and that love was expressed most clearly in speaking the truth to them so that sin wouldn’t continue.
 - We should not see love a truth as opposites, but rather as compliments to one another.
 - If you love the body, you should want them to be growing in truth.
 - As you speak the truth, it should be sheathed in Christ-like love.

RECOMMENDED READING

- *Competent to Counsel* by Jay Adams
- *The Church as a Culture of Care* by T. Dale Johnson Jr.
- *Counsel With Confidence* by Joel James
- *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands* by Paul David Tripp