



THE LIFEGIVING WOMAN

NOVEMBER: INTRO TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING
PART 1

Dear friend,

Recently, I've had a few friends ask me, "What happened to your newsletter?" At this point, responding, "2020 happened" would likely be acceptable. 😊 Yes, life has been full of the crazy and unexpected for all of us this year, and I could probably fill a newsletter just talking about *that*.

But, my reason for pushing pause on the newsletter for a few months is because I entered the last leg of a four-year pursuit of Biblical Counseling certification, and I needed to focus my efforts and attention to finishing well.

It was rigorous, and I'm thankful to report that the Lord carried me through to the end. And, while I've reached the milestone of certification, I will continue to be on a lifelong journey of learning.

I thought I'd give you a little window into the world of Biblical counseling this month. I've learned that many people don't know what it is, and it fits right into the theme of the newsletter, "The Lifegiving Woman."

It also seems appropriate given the season we're all living in. Anxiety is heightened, fear is real, depression is soaring. *People need help*. I'm so thankful that the Lord has given us real help and hope in His Word!

Because so much can be said about it, I'm going to make this a two-part series. Without further ado...

What is Biblical Counseling?

In a nutshell, Biblical counseling is speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). It is a ministry of the Word with the goal of helping others become more like Christ. It is short-term, intensive discipleship with the goal of deep heart transformation.

Crack the nut open, and it is a meaty, compassionate, life-giving ministry.

The reality is that we all give and receive counsel to and from one another. The question is, *what kind of counsel do we give, and what kind of counsel do we receive?*

Whether someone is dealing with depression, anxiety, an abusive relationship, or is stuck in sin, the kind of counsel a person receives matters. *It matters deeply* because behind any counseling model, there is a belief system. And, there is an authority that holds the belief system together.

Biblical Counseling is Theologically Sound

Anthropology and theology drive counseling systems, and both of these things are held in faith. What a counselor believes in regards to what it means to be a human and who God is are of utmost importance in the counseling room, because the counsel given will appeal to whatever *authority* that the counselor has faith in.

By what authority does one give counsel?

Behind most counseling systems is the belief that man is inherently good, and not responsible for his actions or reactions to life's problems. He is amoral. If he reacts poorly to what life brings his way, which might include drinking in excess, overeating, binge watching a favorite show in order to avoid dealing with life's problems, sinful anger, prolonged sadness, etc. it might simply be determined that he has a disorder or disease.

This is a philosophy of man, and it is antithetical to Biblical anthropology. In the Word, we are warned to steer clear of worldly philosophies (Eph 5:6-7, Col. 2:8).

In addition to this, the standard of what is considered normal is elusive. *Who decides what's normal?* If it is men who reject God and His Bible, there are practical and deep implications which arise when we give counsel out of a wrong understanding of man.

Our counsel will be man-centered, or, humanistic. The focus will be on the person and the problem, and will lack nuance. We are complex beings!

But the Lord has given us His Word, which is authoritative, sufficient, and relevant for *all* of life, and is *superior* to man's wisdom. It is "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

I love God's Word!

In it, He has given us a correct anthropology: man is sinful and in need of a Savior. *All* of our hearts are depraved and are in need of transformation. The transformation that occurs comes only through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and His ongoing work of sanctification in our lives through the Holy Spirit Romans 3:23-25 says,

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

Our deepest problems are ultimately *worship* problems.

Therefore, God tells us, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

It's in *God's Word* that normal is defined.

There are real problems that we experience related to the mind. This should not be dismissed or made light of. However, how we understand these problems, their root causes, and how to help people who suffer from them matters. The Bible is astonishingly relevant to life's problems, even ones that seem unexplainable or unsurmountable.

Because the Lord gives us a true anthropology, the Bible understands that human beings experience life-altering trauma, deep depression, consequences from sinful choices, and more.

And it is here, in His Word, that He provides a counseling methodology that is robust, reaching to the deepest parts of the human heart.

Biblical counsel will always seek to reorient the heart from the problem to the person to Christ (John 14:6, Eph. 4:22-24). Life issues are carefully, skillfully worked through, and in a manner that is compassionate, hopeful, and transformational (2 Cor. 5:17).

My ultimate goal when counseling someone is to see them know the Lord's character more deeply, and to walk in a manner pleasing to Him (2 Cor. 5:9, Col. 2:6). It is my joy to come alongside a fellow sufferer and walk with her in a way that yields lifelong fruit. It is one of the biggest privileges of my life and not one I take lightly.

Biblical Counseling is Scripture-Based

As I mentioned, because every counseling model will have an authority that it appeals to, Biblical Counseling appeals to the authority of the Word of God. We as Biblical Counselors believe that it is sufficient, authoritative, comprehensive, and relevant to all of life's problems (Psalm 19:7-14; Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Peter 1:3).

There is not one thing that we'll walk through on this earth that His Word can't speak to. This is an amazing reality, and full of hope! The Lord speaks to issues like depression, trauma, identity, anxiety, fear, grief, marriage troubles, obsessive tendencies, rebellious children, disordered desires, etc.

Because the Lord has given us wisdom in His Word, and real-life examples of each of these situations, we can discern that these are not *disorders*. Some are **normal** responses to abnormal experiences in life (such as abuse, for example).

Some are sinful responses to deeper heart issues regarding unbelief. Some are the result of the sin of others. Regardless of the cause, they are *to be expected* if we have a correct Biblical anthropology of man, and if we let the Bible define normal.

Sin is in the heart of every man, and when one comes to Christ, it is slowly worked out of him over time. *It shouldn't surprise us* that some of us struggle with prolonged sadness, or with a fixation on hand-washing, or despair, for example. Because of sin that we commit and that others commit against us, we are *all* disordered, and are in need of having our minds renewed (Rom. 12:2).

But this is what makes the gospel of Jesus Christ so beautiful. There is hope for *all* of us!

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

In His Word, He has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). We have no need to look outside of God's wisdom for help with our problems. Here, we can make sense of life. And it is here that true help and hope is found.

"Scripture...not only claims to have the answers both to the nature and nurture realities that shape who we are and the mental struggles we all have, but it is completely sufficient through the true knowledge and power of God to meet humanity's greatest needs. In addition to its sufficiency, God's Word is the chief conduit that reveals His love for mankind."[\[1\]](#)

Biblical Counseling Understands that We are Embodied Souls

When God created man, he gave us an inner man and an outer man. A. Craig Troxel describes the heart as, *"..the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose).*

Our outer man is our physical body, what we can see on the outside, but also our inner organs and systems. The inner man and outer man are intertwined, inseparable. We have outer man issues (such as sickness) that affect our inner man (causing depression, for example), but we also have inner man issues (anger, for example) that affect our outer man (can lead to heart attacks in extreme cases).

This dual nature of man goes back to having a correct anthropology. Evolutionary anthropology "sees human beings as machines selected and programmed by nature without responsibility for internal or external actions, machines which can be shocked, injected, recoded, labeled, even discarded when they appear to malfunction. This ideology sees people as inherently good and naturally without impairment. When they become distressed or impaired, they need to be taken in for repair in attempt to restore them to a non-existent standard."[\[2\]](#)

A good Biblical counselor will seek to understand the *whole person* so as to best help her counselee. Perhaps a mom of four is experiencing depression. In order to best help her, Scripture instructs me that it is wise to draw her out, rather than making assumptions (Pr. 15:14, 15:28, 18:13, 15). I will ask her enough questions to help me get as full of a picture of her life as I'm able.

What I might discover is that her depression might have something to do with her erratic sleep schedule, a lack of exercise, and poor eating habits. There could be an underlying medical issue, and it might be best for her to schedule a physical with her doctor.

It could also be that she has a challenging child and feels inadequate to parent him well. Maybe her husband recently changed jobs, and they're experiencing turmoil at church. It could also be that in the mix of it all, there are sinful actions or attitudes of her own that are hindering her.

The good news is that the Bible speaks to each one of these issues!

What my counselee may need is indeed deep encouragement, direction as to how to navigate challenging life circumstances, and discipleship in parenting. But she may also need help thinking through and planning a daily schedule that allows her to get more sleep, exercise, and better nutrition. She may also need help seeing blind spots in her own heart.

Often the question arises, "Are Biblical counselors against medicine?" To be specific, are we against medicine that is used to treat anxiety, depression, etc.? While there is certainly a spectrum of difference as to where individual counselors will land, Biblical counselors are taught not to encourage someone to go off of medicine if they are on it. We are *soul-physicians*, not medical doctors. Because we want to care for the whole person, we are happy to work in tandem with a counselee's medical doctor if the need arises.

A good Biblical counselor will be one who humbly practices discernment as she relates to her counselee (Php. 1:9-11). She will recognize that a counselee's outward circumstances affect her soul, and that the state of her heart affects her physical health.

Biblical Counseling Understands that Change Comes through a Person

To be clear, men who don't know the Lord *can* observe true things regarding the patterns and problems of man thanks to common grace. We can appreciate this!

But they will not accurately assess the *cause* of our problems due to their erroneous anthropology, nor will they truly be able to help someone as they address problems because of their erroneous *theology*. There may be temporary fixes such as symptom relief and behavior modification, but there will not be *transformation*.

Transformation is only possible through the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6), and it takes place at the heart level. Christ's death and resurrection means that there is relief for the sinner and sufferer. He came to make all things new.

Not only that, but Jesus experienced the deepest forms of suffering: rejection, mistreatment, abuse leading to death. Hebrews 4:15-16 says,

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Dane Ortlund explains,

"The reason that Jesus is in such close solidarity with us is that the difficult path we are on is not unique to us. He has journeyed on it himself. It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he is with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease...He was a sinless man, not a sinless Superman... He came as a normal man to normal men. He knows what it is to be thirsty, hungry, despised, rejected, scorned, shamed, embarrassed, abandoned, misunderstood, falsely accused, suffocated, tortured, and killed. He knows what it is to be lonely. His friends abandoned him when he needed them most...The key to understanding the significance of Hebrews 4:15 is to push equally hard on "in every respect" and "yet without sin." All of our weaknesses—indeed, all our life—is tainted with sin. If sin were the color blue, all that we say, do, and think has some taint of blue. Not so Jesus. He had no sin. He was "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners" (Heb. 7:26-27). But we must ponder the phrase "in every respect" in a way that maintains Jesus's sinlessness without diluting what that phrase means. That enticing temptation, that sore trial, that bewildering perplexity—he has been there. Indeed, his utter purity suggests that he has felt these pains more acutely than we sinners ever could."

He goes on to say,

“There, right there, we have a Friend who knows exactly what such testing feels like, and sits close to us, embraces us. With us. Solidarity...Jesus’s sinlessness means that he knows temptation better than we ourselves do...he therefore knows the strength of temptation better than any of us. Only he knows the true cost...Our sinless high priest is not one who needs rescue but one who provides it. This is why we can go to him to “receive mercy and find grace” (4:16). He himself is not trapped in the hole of sin with us; he alone can pull us out. His sinlessness is our salvation.”[\[3\]](#)

Because Biblical counseling is rooted in solid theology, a good Biblical counselor recognizes that they are *not* the most important person in the process, and that they are not the change agent. The Holy Spirit is **the** most important person in the counseling room, and He is the one bringing about deep heart change in the life of the counselee (John 14:15-16:16; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

This is why, as I’ll discuss in part two, Biblical counseling methodology is more directive than other counseling methods. As Christians, we are called to participate in our sanctification, not be passive spectators. The counselor will serve to lead and guide someone to Christ in specific ways.

The hope of Jesus Christ is that it is possible for *any* person to grow and change. Nobody is beyond hope and help. The beauty of the gospel is that it offers each one of us the deepest, truest hope and help that *far surpasses* any of man’s ever-changing philosophies.

“Biblical counselors know that it is impossible to speak wisely and lovingly to bring about true and lasting change apart from the decisive, compassionate, and convicting work of the Spirit in the counselor and the counselee. We acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the One who illuminates our understanding of the Word and empowers its application in everyday life.”[\[4\]](#)

To close, consider the tender affection that Jesus Christ has toward sinners and sufferers. *This is the heartbeat of Biblical counseling. “What would it be like for a friend to take our two hands and place them on the chest of the risen Lord Jesus Christ so that, like a stethoscope letting us hear the vigorous strength of a beating heart physically, our hands let us feel the vigorous strength of Christ’s deepest affections and longings?”*

All of us are invited to be ambassadors of this gospel of reconciliation to one another. All of us can participate, at some level, in this sort of gospel care.

Next month, I’ll conclude this brief intro to Biblical counseling. Please feel free to reply to this email if you have any questions regarding what I’ve discussed here.

Lastly, a few favorites for you.

1. I’m loving the Golden Hour candle from [Chosen Candle](#). I love that two post-college guys are making candles to help fight human trafficking. Check them out!
2. If you’ve not yet read [Gentle and Lowly](#) by Dane Ortlund, I highly recommend buying it ASAP and then *slowly* reading and digesting it. It is at the top of my favorites list.
3. Lastly, [the Journeywoman podcast had an excellent episode about Relational Brokenness](#) that is worth the listen.

I pray you have a wonderful start to a memorable holiday season. Happy Thanksgiving! I'll "see" you in December.

With love,

Kelly

[1]. Daniel Berger, Mental Illness, Volume 1, 130

[2]. Ibid, 133

[3]. Dane Ortlund, Gently and Lowly, 45-49

[4]. <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>

kellytarr.com



You received this email because you signed up on our website or made a purchase from us.

[Unsubscribe](#)

mailer lite