



Gospel Counseling

FIVE CORE VALUES

The Role of the Local Church

God has given his church the ministry of reconciliation, charging us to care for and shepherd his children. The care and counseling of the souls of God's people should be done primarily through the church, God's chosen instrument of love and reconciliation.

As sin and the common issues of a fallen world afflict God's people, we have to consider whom he has chosen to care for them. If our deepest struggles result from a disbelief in God, then our greatest hope and healing must be found in believing God and his word for us. Who can better communicate and apply God's word to a person's heart than his church?

The church has been entrusted with the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4) and the proclamation of the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). It is made up of God's chosen people whom he has given to be his ministers of reconciliation to the world, and to each other.

“PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES AND TO ALL THE FLOCK, IN WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS MADE YOU OVERSEERS, TO CARE FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD, WHICH HE OBTAINED WITH HIS OWN BLOOD.” – ACTS 20:28

Our ultimate goal in counseling is to apply the gospel to a person's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes having the fullness of God as being “strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:16-17).

As a church, we seek to embody these wonderful truths through our care and counseling ministry. In all that we do, we are committed to creating a context in which every person coming through our doors will find a safe and loving place to experience the grace and truth of the gospel. We accomplish this through professional and pastoral counseling, equipping the church, and community involvement.

PROFESSIONAL & PASTORAL COUNSELING

Our professional counselors give needed insight into the psychological and mental aspects of the counseling, while staying rooted in Jesus and the gospel. All of our staff counselors are all Licensed Professional Counselors, or Master's students working towards licensure.

Our pastors provide care and counsel more informally, and work towards placing someone in need of counsel back in community where they can be loved and cared for by the church body. They also focus on developing people within the church to be ministers of the gospel to one another.

EQUIPPING THE CHURCH

To better equip our church to give wise counsel to one another, we provide training and resources aimed at growing a person in their abilities as a lay counselor. All Christians should be able to effectively “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11) in the truth of God's word. We are also committed to equip local churches to respond in crisis through our well-trained staff, consultations, training events, and conferences.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

True and lasting change comes through the power of the gospel in the context of community. We aren't meant to live in isolation, but in the presence of God and his people; this is especially true in the midst of struggle and sin. We promote an advocate model of counseling, where a person is encouraged to have another Christian come to counseling sessions with them. Advocates can help a person not feel alone in their struggle, bring additional insight into their counseling sessions, and are able to continue care after and in between sessions. Additionally, these advocates become more equipped to give wise counsel to others as they are shown how the gospel speaks to even the most difficult struggles.

The Church's Calling to God's Mission

In Christ, God's mission becomes our mission. We are called to be a part of his mission to reconcile all things to himself through his son Jesus. This has deep implications for counseling God's people into their identity in Christ and their calling to his mission.

It has been said that "the church doesn't have a mission; the mission has a church." God has been on his mission since before creation to unite all things in Christ. He has chosen to use his church to fulfill that mission; 2 Corinthians 5 speaks about all Christians who have been made into new creations in Christ, saying that we have been made an instrument to bring about God's kingdom.

"THEREFORE, WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US. WE IMPLORE YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIST, BE RECONCILED TO GOD. FOR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD." – 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-21

For us to walk someone into their role as an ambassador for God, their foundational identity must first be established and understood.

CHRIST CENTERED

Paul first said, "If anyone is in Christ" and then continued on to describe our ministry in him; he did that because you have to know who you are before you can know what to do. Every command and instruction in the New Testament is founded in who we are in relation to God. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation... (2 Cor. 5:17). Knowing our identity allows us to faithfully serve *together* on mission.

COMMUNITY FOCUSED

Jesus' called his church his body. And, just like a body, it is made up of many parts (Romans 12:5) that work together for the good of the entire body (1 Cor. 12). When a person is suffering or in sin, because we are all one in Christ together, it truly does affect the entire church.

"IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER; IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE TOGETHER."
– 1 CORINTHIANS 12:26

Because we are one body, our counseling is passionately community focused. This means that we strongly encourage every person we counsel to be a part of a community of believers. Through gospel centered community, God's church can come along side a person in need.

MISSION DRIVEN

We have been made new in Christ *together*, and because of that our counseling is passionately missionary. We aren't God's ambassadors on our own—we are only his ambassadors along side the rest of his church. So as people are given counsel, they continue with their church community to live as God's ambassadors.

We are not a perfect church on God's mission, but we are a redeemed church. Our counseling aims to shine the light of the gospel onto the darkness of sin, showing that God still uses us to make his appeal to the world. His wonderful grace to all who are in Christ empowers us to be on his mission.

Through counseling, a person can take the truth and help that they have been given, and use that to build up and encourage their community in the gospel. And, together, they can minister to the lost and broken people around them. This is a community on God's mission.

God's Glory and Sovereignty in Suffering

The deepest need of a person in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and sin, is for them to rest in the love and presence of their heavenly Father. Believing rightly that God knows us in our suffering brings him glory, and gives us comfort in our time of need.

Because he is truly sovereign over all things, there is no suffering that is not seen and known by God. As ministers of the Gospel, we cling to this truth as we desperately depend on the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of the people we love and care for. But when a person comes to us broken in pain and suffering, how do we faithfully communicate and embody God's truth and his character in a way that they behold and cherish him in the midst of their suffering? How do we honor God by proclaiming him as he is—worthy of glory, sovereign over all things, and at the same time perfectly loving and good? We must share, in love, the truth about God that we cling to so desperately.

God's glory is manifest in many aspects of his nature; in the context of suffering, his glory is shown in that he fully knows the depth of his children's suffering; and, he is powerful, good and loving to act for our good despite that suffering. The mystery of God's sovereign love and grace that is present through suffering is shown very clearly in the Exodus story. His people had suffered brutally as slaves for over 400 years in Egypt, and they cried out to God in the midst of their trouble. And God heard their cry.

“GOD SAW THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL—AND GOD KNEW.” – EXODUS 2:25

God knows us in the midst of our suffering, and he is able to act powerfully to bring us out of it. For the Israelites, God rescued them by physically bringing them out of slavery and into a land he set aside for them. For a person today experiencing emotional, physical, or psychological pain, God can lovingly restore them as well. Moreover, God can be enough for them as he has given everything to his children through his son Jesus (Rom. 8:31-32). Our identity as sons and daughters of God (Galatians 4:6) is foundational to a biblical view of suffering. Being saved by the blood of Christ, we can cry as Jesus did, “Abba, Father,” calling upon our heavenly Father to save us - especially in the midst of any present suffering. Christians have been adopted into God's family and are loved with the same love that God the Father has for Jesus! We no longer suffer in isolation but in God's presence as beloved children. If you are in Christ, you are known and loved by God (1 Cor. 8:3).

Perhaps our greatest hope in suffering is found in our savior. Jesus suffered more shame, rejection, and wrath than any of us ever will.

“FOR IT WAS FITTING THAT HE, FOR WHOM AND BY WHOM ALL THINGS EXIST, IN BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY, SHOULD MAKE THE FOUNDER OF THEIR SALVATION PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING.” – HEBREWS 2:10

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus desperately cried out to God, asking him to relieve him from his coming suffering at the cross. His pain was real—his soul was in deep anguish. Yet God in his sovereignty led Jesus straight into the depth of pain and suffering. This was to accomplish his eternal plan to adopt his children into his family—and it was also what would bring him the most glory as his people would find forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. God will at times allow us to suffer, and we, like Jesus, must trust that he knows us in our suffering. Jesus can identify and sympathize with us because he has suffered even more than us, and we can come to him knowing that he understands our pain.

We glorify God when we rest in our good Father (Luke 22:42), trusting that he loves us (John 17:23) and that he will work everything for our good—even the darkest sorrow, suffering, and sin (Rom. 8:28-30). Jesus is where we find our hope—in his saving grace, his ever present help and comfort, and our future glorification and eternal life that will be spent enjoying him.

“NOW MAY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF, AND GOD OUR FATHER, WHO LOVED US AND GAVE US ETERNAL COMFORT AND GOOD HOPE THROUGH GRACE, COMFORT YOUR HEARTS AND ESTABLISH THEM IN EVERY GOOD WORK AND WORD.” – 2 THESS. 2:16-17

The Sacredness of Biblical Marriage

Marriage is first and foremost a representation of Jesus and his love for his church. Because of this deep foundational purpose, we hold a high view of the sacredness, importance, and value of marriage, and seek to nurture it through our care and counseling.

Before we can look at earthly marriage, we have to first look to the creator of marriage. God he knew that Adam wasn't meant to be alone, so he created a woman to be his helper and companion. As God instituted the first wedding ceremony, Adam rejoiced in son over his bride. This was a model for all God honoring marriages to follow, and it was also an image of what was to come.

"HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY HER, HAVING CLEANSED HER BY THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD, SO THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF IN SPLendor, WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING, THAT SHE MIGHT BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH." — EPHESIANS 5:25-27

Jesus loves his church! All that Jesus has done to save his bride should serve as a model to strive for in marriage. All that is done in marriage should reflect and image what Jesus has done for us.

As husbands are called to more prominently reflect God the Son in a leadership role, wives are called to image God the Spirit in the role of a helper and comforter. Because of sin, our roles will be marred by a failure to perfectly reflect our God in marriage; husbands won't be a perfect leader to his wife, and wives won't be perfect helpers and comforters to their husbands. But, there is hope amidst our shortcomings. A husband can rejoice that Jesus will always be a better husband to his wife than he could ever be. A wife can rejoice that the same word, helper, that described Eve also describes God many times throughout the Bible (Ps. 33:20, Ps. 115:10), and know that the Holy Spirit will always be a better help and comforter to her husband than she could ever be. Jesus is our model, our help, and our hope in marriage.

As we look to God as our model for marriage, we have to remember his Trinitarian nature. God exists as three distinct persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), yet as one God. We see evidently through Scripture that he has perfect love, relationship, and community with himself in his Trinitarian nature.

- **THE FATHER LOVES THE SON, GIVING ALL THINGS TO HIM TO DEMONSTRATE HIS AFFECTION.**
- **THE SON LOVES THE FATHER, AND EVERY ACTION HE TAKES IS ULTIMATELY TO BRING HIM GLORY.**
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT LOVES THE SON AND THE FATHER, AND IN LOVE IS DRIVEN TO LEAD PEOPLE TO JESUS AND HIS WORD.**

If marriage is intended to reflect God and his nature, these elements of God's character listed above should be present in marriage. This means that husbands and wives must practically demonstrate love and affection, seek to bring the other person honor, and always fight to make Jesus their ultimate hope and help.

We hold marriage very dearly and work diligently towards nurturing it. As sin hinders our ability to perfectly image Christ in marriage, it also serves to drive us away from Christ; so, husbands and wives have to be proactive in fighting sin together to protect the unity and sacredness of their marriage.

Through gospel counseling, we are able to first talk about our savior, and then encourage couples to be more conformed to his image together in their marriage.

"THEREFORE BE IMITATORS OF GOD, AS BELOVED CHILDREN. AND WALK IN LOVE, AS CHRIST LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US, A FRAGRANT OFFERING AND SACRIFICE TO GOD... THIS MYSTERY IS PROFOUND, AND I AM SAYING THAT IT REFERS TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. HOWEVER, LET EACH ONE OF YOU LOVE HIS WIFE AS HIMSELF, AND LET THE WIFE SEE THAT SHE RESPECTS HER HUSBAND. " — EPHESIANS 5:1-2, 32-33

The Centrality of the Gospel in Psychology

We look at both secular and Christian psychology through a biblical, gospel-focused lens, and receive from it whatever is helpful and truthful; this lets us build a holistic counseling framework that honors God and is profitable for his people.

All that we do is firmly rooted in God; this means that his word and his power are foundational to our counsel. We must rely fully on him to even hope to share his truth with our counselees. Even more than that, we counsel with full faith in God, knowing that his power must be present and active for true change to occur in someone's heart, and for our counsel to honor and glorify him.

“TO THIS END WE ALWAYS PRAY FOR YOU, THAT OUR GOD MAY MAKE YOU WORTHY OF HIS CALLING AND MAY FULFILL EVERY RESOLVE FOR GOOD AND EVERY WORK OF FAITH BY HIS POWER, SO THAT THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS MAY BE GLORIFIED IN YOU, AND YOU IN HIM, ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF OUR GOD AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.” –2 THESS. 1:11-12

As we build a biblical psychology of counseling, we never abandon or add to the gospel—rather, we use the wealth of useful teaching and knowledge from the physiological field of study to help us understand God's people and minister to them more effectively. Just as a pastor can use secular historical accounts to give more background to a biblical text, counselors can use psychology to help them better understand the mystery of how God has formed our mind and hearts. What we're aiming for is truth—what is helpful? what is redeemable? what can we learn to better see people as God sees them? Everything that is actually *true* in this world comes from the God of truth, so we don't run from what is true in psychology. The Bible clearly shows us that we are fallen, and this includes our minds. Because of that, we have to take a posture of humility and be willing to learn from the resources that are available. Every person bears the image of God, and his common grace is manifested not only to his children but also every single person on earth. So we observe, discern, and thankfully use what God has revealed in psychology.

With all this in mind, we move from our foundation to our practices in counseling. What does it mean to have a biblical psychology of counseling? What does that practically look like in a counseling session?

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO HAVE A HEART TO LOVE AND MINISTER THROUGH THE TRUTH OF THE WORD.**
- **METHODS OF OBSERVATION CAN HELP US UNDERSTAND AND KNOW THE HEART OF THE PERSON SITTING ACROSS FROM US.**
- **A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS HELP US TO COMFORT SOMEONE DEALING WITH ISSUES OUT OF THEIR CONTROL.**
- **USING ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES AND COMMUNICATION METHODS LET US MORE EFFECTIVELY SPEAK TRUTH, ESPECIALLY WHEN WORDS CAN BUILD UP OR TEAR DOWN A PERSON IN NEED.**
- **ANALYSIS AND DIAGNOSIS GIVE US TOOLS TO AID US AS WE CONSIDER HOW TO CARE FOR SOMEONE DURING AND AFTER A COUNSELING SESSION.**

In Hebrews 4:12-13, God's word is described as being able to discern the thoughts and intentions of our heart, exposing all things to God. We never base our hope in any system, therapeutic model, or process, but a person, our great comforter and king Jesus. We use the word wisely through the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is our aide in applying God's truth to a person's heart and soul.

“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. AND NO CREATURE IS HIDDEN FROM HIS SIGHT, BUT ALL ARE NAKED AND EXPOSED TO THE EYES OF HIM TO WHOM WE MUST GIVE ACCOUNT.” – HEBREWS 4:12-13