

Biblical Counseling

Westwood Church / Jeff Burden 1.23.2022

Today, I'd like to spend some time talking about biblical counseling and how to use Scriptures in relation to the issues of everyday life.

Let me begin by saying that the Christian life is filled with blessings!

We have been saved from the penalties of sin, we have a wonderful church family, and get the privilege of serving the Lord every day!

And, while all of that is true, it doesn't mean that all problems in the world just go away.

- At times, we experience a life that is messy.
- There are marriage issues, disease can strike, & depression can overtake us.
- There are a lot of worldly issues that have to be managed.

And, while there is a deep abiding joy in our hearts, while we know that God is in control and is sovereign... there are times that life can feel like a big fat mess and we just need someone to help us through it.

But, listen, Christians worldwide are a part of God's family.

- Here at Westwood, we are a family. And, these are family issues.

So, I want to start with 2 questions I'd like you to think about...

- **#1 is: Who would you go to for "biblical counsel"?**
- **#2 is: if someone comes to you... can you provide biblical counsel?**

How would you respond to a friend, a fellow Christian that came to you and said,

- *"I'm struggling with depression and I often feel hopeless."*
- A friend admits that they *"struggle with temptation and are weak when faced with sin."*
- A friend says, *"I get so angry with (so and so). In fact, I struggle with anger inwardly... no one would really guess it, but I can think some awful thoughts!"*

These are not uncommon comments! You and I hear them every day!

Who would you go to? Or, how would you respond to that friend?

If they come to you, you've only got a few options:

- 1) Politely brush them off. "You'll figure it out." "Hang in there." Or, (sometimes) "I'll be praying about that."
- 2) **Lean in and invest time with them, taking them to the Word and guiding them through the issue?**
- 3) Suggest that they call someone like an Elder or Pastor to talk about it.

4) Suggest they get professional counseling, like a Christian counselor.

I'm sure a lot would depend on the issue, wouldn't it?

- And, your response might depend on how competent you feel about the topic.
- And, (other than the first option) the other three options can all be good choices.

Let's focus on that 2nd option.

- This one can be hard and can require a lot of us and a lot of time.
- But, that one is actually what God's Word tells us to do, first.

Again, today's topic is about being able, as a Christian, to give biblical counsel to another believer because you care about them and they are a part of your church family.

We have a responsibility to disciple, care for and counsel one another with God's Word.

We see this in several passages:

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says,

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

Proverbs 19:20-21 says,

Get all the advice and instruction (Godly wisdom) you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life.

Matthew 28:19,

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...."

Romans 15:14 says,

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

In reality, biblical counseling is a piece of the discipleship process.

- In Matthew (just quoted), Jesus says, *"Make disciples... teaching them to obey."*
- Abby Dill and Ben Russell just finished 6-week studies on discipleship.
- Caring for others by being a "Paul" over a "Timothy."
- Growing others in the faith, pulling each other along as a real family does!

True discipleship includes being able to give biblical answers to our friends, family and others that have problems that they don't know what to do with!

I think that sometimes, we make the mistake of thinking that counseling happens in a formal setting, like an office.

- Or, laying on a couch with the psychiatrist smoking a pipe, talking about your mother and interpreting your dreams.
- Or, telling secrets to a stranger that you hardly know.

No! That shouldn't be our first option.

- It should happen with a Christian friend over a cup of coffee.
- It should be done with your kids at bed time (that's when all the good questions come out)!
- Biblical counseling should happen after playing basketball or during a round of golf.

Now, don't get me wrong...

- There's a place for professional, Christian counselors. We're grateful for them!
- And yes, pastor Dave (and Ben) shepherd and lead and give counsel to the flock (and they love it!)
- But, often, we are too quick to pass off difficult issues to other people.

Here at Westwood, we want to create a culture of discipleship.

And, honestly, as I look across the Westwood body, I see a very mature family!

- I believe that most of you come and are plugged in to this church because you are grateful to the Lord for all he's done... and want to serve others and grow in your faith!
- Are there are some Christians who are still young in their faith who are not yet as fully mature? Yes.
- But, overall, as I look across this room, I see Christians are able and want to serve each other.

In fact, it was a mature group of Christians that triggered Paul to write what he wrote in Romans 15. Let's turn there.

- This is the passage I referenced a few minutes ago.
- Paul is wrapping up his letter to the Christians in Rome.

And, here in 15:14, he says

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

He's encouraging them, saying they are **1)** *"full of goodness..."*

- These believers hated sin, hated evil.
- Their attitudes and actions displayed a love for righteousness.

He also said they are **2)** *"filled with knowledge..."*

- He's not talking about their "head knowledge"... He's not suggesting that they already have all the answers.
- No, he was talking about Christians that understood the full scope of Christian truth, found in God's Word!
- They relied on the direction of the Word, on God and the Holy Spirit.

Pause: This is a strong hint as to who you should go to! Or, whether or not you are ready to give counsel...

Because, in this one verse, Paul has laid the groundwork for the requirements to be a biblical counselor.

- 1) An obedient Christian that has a deep desire for killing off sin and living in holiness and maturity.
- 2) AND a follower that is doctrinally sound, loving and living by the Scriptures.

Does that description fit the person you would go to?

And... is that you? (Full of goodness and filled with knowledge)

Because Paul goes on to say, **3)** that these are the kind of Christians that are (look again), "*competent to counsel one another.*"

That word "counsel" is important!

- It has its roots in the Greek word "nouthesia."
- It means the ability to, "*to admonish, correct or instruct other Christians, biblically*" or "*counseling each other from the Scriptures*".
- Some call it "biblical counseling" other even call it "Nouthetic counseling."

And, **why** are Christians competent to counsel each other?

Well, let's look at the verse just before Romans 15:14... look at verse 13,

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We, as Christians, are able to counsel because God fills us... and we trust Him... and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit! He IS the counselor!

- It is the principal work of the HS to grow us... His work is for our sanctification!
- And, if biblical counseling is a key part of discipleship and discipleship is a key part of sanctification... then, the HS must be considered the most important person in this process.
- He gets the credit for our ability to counsel others.

Next, Turn over to Colossians, chapter 3.

- Here, we see an example of a slightly less mature group. They were slipping off track.
- But, Paul wants them to grow and be mature so badly, that he needs to reach in to **give counsel**.
 - *(Do you ever feel that urge? Where you want to pull others up so they can also experience how awesome the Christian life can be?)*
- That is what Paul is doing, here in Colossians!

Here, Paul says that Christians should let God's Word "*indwell you*"... "live in you".

In Colossians 3:16 he says,

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."

Look at that word "admonish" (circle it).

- Almost identical to the word we saw in Romans 15 (nouthesia), it is the Greek word "noutheteo."
- Again, it means to *"instruct, or rebuke (when wrong doing) and teach proper behavior."*

Paul brought the truth of Scripture to them, because it's the solution to all problems!

- Biblical counseling is what we all need!
- I want to be deep in the Word so that I can pull you up, when the world crashes in!
- And, I want you to be deep, so you can pull me up... because I'll need it too!

Biblical counseling (nouthetic counseling) should be commonplace in our church family!

- So, when life does feel like a big fat mess, we have each other to lean on.

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So, let's take this information and put it into a clear definition.

**Biblical counseling is the discipleship ministry of God's family.**

**It is God centered and dependent upon Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit.**

**Biblical counseling seeks to realign desires, affections, and behaviors toward the original way that God designed us, in an effort to restore true worship of God and right fellowship with others.**

The key words/phrases I see here are:

- **Discipleship.** To me, that means teaching/learning from someone... how to live the Christian life.
- **God centered.** He's the focus.
  - Biblical counselors should always ask, "What is God teaching us?" and "How can God be glorified, here?"
- **Dependent on Scripture.** Meaning, the source of truth. Living Word!
- **Work of the HS.** Ultimately, He is "the counselor!"
  - So, that means, prayer. Listening. Dependence. Surrender.
- **Realignment.** To me, that means less worldly thinking, more Christ-like thinking.
  - Lining my heart up with God's in obedience, submission.
- **The Result?** Getting the vertical right (worship). Getting the horizontal right (fellowship with each other).

So, let's put that definition into action.

1)~~~~~

A Christian friend has been talking to you about some family difficulties and one day over lunch, they say, "I'm having a really hard time with my relationship with my parents."

- They feel like the situation **is hopeless** and will never change.

It doesn't require a professional therapist to ask a few questions (stay out of drama).

- Have them describe the situation, get a feeling for how arguments go, what triggers these situations?
- **Listen for the deeper issue.**
  - It is rarely about the obvious, surface stuff.
  - There's usually a deeper, heart issue that is motivating the problem.
- Take the attention off of the other person (no control) and gently come around to looking at the areas you can control... you.

Then, take them to the Bible (casually) and talk about the source of the problem.

It may take you to Scriptures about,

- Leaving and cleaving (*Covenant between Adam/Eve in Gen 2*).
- What does it look like to honor parents as adults? (Deut 20 / Eph 6)
- Jealousy, because they treat a sibling differently than you. (Jam 3-4)
- It may be purely the sin of the parent and how to deal with that (or how NOT to contribute to it!)

*But, all of your answers should be geared toward realigning the vertical and the horizontal.*

- *Staying in obedience and right worship of God.*
- *And, treating others like Christ would so you've got right relationships with them.*

2)~~~~~

Another common topic that people struggle with is depression.

I've had several friends deal with this at different levels of severity.

Someone comes to you and explains how they've had months and months of heavy work stress, pressure from all sides.

- It is weighing on them, because it was beginning to impact their character and go against their principals.
- Maybe you uncover the fact that over a long time, the company has slowly been trying to pull this Christian into worldly business practices.

And, they are depressed!

So, when they lay down at night, their mind races with "what ifs" and worry.

- They can't sleep, and when they do, they wake with satan attacking their thoughts.
- They feel like there was no relief coming... **no hope** of a solution and they are depressed.

Depending on the different issues that are uncovered, we could take that person to Scriptures that focus on,

- Being blessed despite suffering for doing what is right (1 Peter 3),
- The sovereignty of God and how in all things God works for the good (Rom 8.28).
- Deep seeded fears (Isa 41, Phil 4:6-7)
- They are doing the right thing and satan is ticked... so, spiritual warfare.
  - The armor of God (Ephesians 6).

(Focus on the vertical and horizontal)

Or, maybe you conclude that this person is simply feeling alone and hopeless.

- We could bring encouragement by looking at 2 Timothy...
- In fact, let's do that real quick... **Turn to 2 Timothy, chapter 3.**

This whole book is very encouraging.

- Here, we find a younger Christian (Timothy) getting biblical counsel from Paul.
- Timothy has seen some of these same things that our friend is seeing.
- That the world wants to pull you off message.
- He experiences persecution for speaking truth.

So, we go to chapter 3, verse 10, where Paul say... *"I've been there... I get it!"*

As it says in 3:10,

*<sup>10</sup> You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.*

I've been there, I get it!

*Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.*

Paul brings Timothy hope! You are NOT alone! God is in control!

The Lord rescued me from ALL of them! He goes on,

*<sup>12</sup> In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...*

This is the world we live in!

Then, Paul gives more hope by taking him back in time... look at your history!

Remember the victories (ie: David killing lions and bears... then goliath)

*<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Timothy, God's Word is where you will find your encouragement... your hope...

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Jump down to chapter 4 v5, Paul says, hang in there! You are being obedient!

*<sup>5</sup> But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

Now, I know our friend (in our example) may not be in ministry, not a preacher.

- But, is your life not an example of the gospel being preached?
- Are you not being attacked (by the world and by satan) for living for God?

Do you see how you can use a simple passage like this to encourage someone that feels lonely and hopeless?

**God's Word brings hope to the hopeless!**

**God's Word reminds you of His promises for your life today and in eternity!**

Listen, whatever the problem,

- Whether it is your relationship with your parents, depression, pornography, marriage, or anger... **people need need to know that there is hope.**
- Christians, we all need reminders from people that will love us, that **there is hope and this problem can be dealt with by relying on the HS and looking at the Scriptures!**

If we look around, at the world, there is no hope!

- But, if we look at God's Word, we see nothing BUT hope!

Does it remove the problem? Maybe, maybe not.

- But, it certainly gives encouragement and endurance if it's God's will that we go THROUGH the problem (not get around it).

God is in the business of growing us and changing lives!

- I've seen marriages on the brink of disaster... people that have gone public with "we are getting a divorce", changed over time (thru biblical counseling), into a picture of Christ and his bride.
- Where a husband and a wife see the other as more important than themselves!
- I've seen how God has changed men (thru biblical counseling) from being lust filled and self-centered into men that have shifted their focus on putting Christ first and living in holiness.

**Because only God can bring hope and through God, change is possible!**

I don't know what each of you are going through this morning.

- But, if you are in the middle of a storm, look up the line for a mature Christian, someone that you know that leans on Scripture and loves Jesus.
- Don't wait. Don't put it off. Satan would love that.
- Lean on a church family member that you trust and get the relief that Scriptures can bring.

At the same time, look down the line to see if someone needs to be pulled up.

- You don't have to have all the answers.
- You just have to make yourself available.

- There is no greater feeling than being in the middle of God's will for your life!
- So, be available!

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In closing, the me throw in a few final thoughts:

Again, we want to create a culture of discipleship, here at Westwood.

Our hope is that every member catches a vision for this type of care—

1. We as Elders, the Pastors, and the staff set the precedent.
 - a. We are committed to shepherding this family through teaching/preaching and by doing.
2. We also sharing this expectation as new people join the church.
 - a. We tell new member candidates that we expect family members to serve family members.
3. Your part?
 - a. Start listening and be watchful for opportunities to love on each other.
 - b. Don't be too quick to brush off or send to a pastor...
 - c. Please pray that biblical counseling becomes a normal part of how our family works!

And, let me say this, if you are sitting there thinking...

- *"Interesting topic but I'm just not there yet."*
- Keep growing! Keep reading! Keep praying!
- Work on your walk and find someone to disciple you, to pull you up.

Every Sunday morning, Tim Williams is teaching from different books of the Bible... right now, the book of Isaiah.

- Next Sunday, Alex and Erin Abbott begin a new study on parenting!
- These are both great ways to keep growing in your faith.

Others of you are thinking...

- *"I love the idea of helping others thru biblical counseling!"*
- Same advice, keep growing!
- **But, to go a step further...**
- Over the next 6 weeks, I will be leading a class on biblical counseling.
- This is your opportunity to learn some basics on how you can point people in the right direction with the Word of God.

Or, you may see a topic here that you just want to learn more about for your own life.

- Feel free to pop in and out of these classes as you want.
- All of these classes start next Sunday in the fellowship hall at 8:45 am.

The key takeaways this morning should be that,

- We should get to a place where we think of it as “normal” to counsel each other.
- The Bible is where we find truth.
- God has given us everything we need in the Holy Spirit and Scriptures to handle this life.

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**PRAYER**

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