# INTRODUCTION

# Why Does This Matter?

I sat down to write this lesson on Monday morning and shortly after I started, a wife from CHBC called. Her life is very broken and her marriage is a wreck. And in short she feels hopeless. To use her words, “My marriage is beyond fixing.”

Sounds horrible, doesn’t it? A hopeless Christian. Almost seems like an oxymoron. Christians are supposed to be filled with hope, right? After all, they have given their life over to a Savior, an all-perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful God who died on their behalf to rescue them from the perils of their own sin. Shouldn’t that be enough to save them from the pitfalls and plights of this difficult world? Well, you might be surprised by my answer – yes and no.

Yes, the gospel is the power that saves. And Christ is the only true Savior. What Christ did on the cross 2000 years ago completely changes our outlook on life. His life, death and resurrection is what folks in the sports world call a “game changer.” His life (moreso than any other life in all of history) makes a difference for us. We can trust him and he will rescue us. That’s the gospel in the nutshell, and many in this room can testify to the power of the gospel to change our life and make a difference.

BUT, my answer must also be “no.” Every person in the room can also testify to the fact that we’re not done yet. Though we have been rescued, sin still plagues our life, so there is a *daily* battle in a fallen world that we all face. It’s an inescapable, self-evident reality that we all must face. Sin corrupts every life in this room—sin lies; it cheats; it deceives; it fools; it undermines; it laughs; it taunts; it hates; it ruins; it runs; it forgets; it mocks; and the list can go on and on. Sin ruins life.

You know this to be true, right? What does this look like your life? Did you get frustrated at traffic this morning? Did you and your spouse or your children have a bit of a tussle as you got ready for church? Did you skip time in the Word this week? Did you have a difficult conversation with a co-worker or a friend? Have you struggled with doubts? Did you give in to a habitual sin this past month? Did you tell a white lie, thinking no one will really know or really care? Did you rationalize your sin, deny something that is hard to swallow, or blame someone this week? Did you eat more than you should have? Did you say something your regret?

So the first question we have to wrestle with is: “Why does this matter?” Why would you be spending your first hour at church in a class about biblical counseling? My short answer is that *sin corrupts everything*. Because sin has ruined our world we need help to know how to fight for faith in this fallen world. That’s why it matters—we can’t fight sin on our own. To make it through life we need help from other brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be humble enough to ask others for help so we don’t have to fight this battle by ourselves. We need wise counsel from the Word so that we can fight the fight of faith.

# What is Biblical Counseling?

# Many of us have been in the position when someone has asked for our counsel at some time or another. So, a second important question for us to ask is, “What does it mean to give counsel to those who are struggling?” It can mean a lot of things:

* To give advice or to advise.
* To give your opinion on a subject.
* To provide guidance for someone’s situation.
* A recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct
* To speak wisely or unwisely into someone’s life.
* To speak comfort, hope, or encouragement

*Counseling* is the act of giving counsel to someone.

# If you look up counseling in Webster’s Dictionary (1979), you find the following definition: “professional guidance of the individual using psychological methods.” Did you notice how this definition claims that counseling is something that only someone with a professional degree can give? It also says that when you provide counseling, you are helping people by providing psychological ways of thinking, feeling, or behaving.

Sadly, I think Webster’s Definition reflects how most Christians think of counseling: It is something done in an office, by a professional, and it is very psychological.

In contrast to Webster, I would like to suggest an alternate way to think about counseling that is distinctly Christian: *Biblical counseling is the opportunity to speak into someone’s life using God’s wisdom, and not your own.*

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. We are not giving our own opinion. Rather, we are trying to help people to view their situations from God’s perspective.

How is that we, as counselors, find God’s wisdom? We find it in His Word. God’s Word and the person of Jesus Christ is the foundational cornerstone from which we as biblical counselors provide our advice, encouragement, and comfort. As one biblical counselor put it at the recent CCEF conference, “my job is not to change the person, but to introduce them to the one who can.”

To find God’s wisdom, a biblical counselor needs to be in God’s Word regularly. He or she must be characterized by a lifestyle of mining the deep well of Scripture to shape the content and the method of his or her counseling. In Colossians 3, Paul writes, 16 ***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly***, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,” (cf. Joshua 1:8; Ps 119:105)**.**

**Your Calling as an Ambassador**

There are a lot of ways to define your role or calling as a Christian. One of those is that of a *Christian Ambassador*. Paul defines this call for us in 2 Cor 5:14-6:2:

**14** For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. **15** And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

**16** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. **21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**1** As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. **2** For he says,

   “In the time of my favor I heard you,   
   and in the day of salvation I helped you.”

   I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.

Understanding the text:

* v. 18 - What is this message of reconciliation? God is reconciling us to himself through Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.
* v. 19 - Who has this message of reconciliation been committed to? “to us.”
* What does Paul call us? Ambassadors.
* v. 20 - What do we know about ambassadors from this text – God is making his appeal through us.
  + What is an “appeal”? an argument, plea, attempting to persuade.
  + What are we pressing onto others? This message of reconciliation: We are pleading with people to turn from their sin and to turn back to God.
  + Why is this needed? vs. 15 – “And he died for all, that those who live *should no longer live for themselves* but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Sin makes us all naturally inclined to live for ourselves. Our greatest problem is our own sin and selfishness and self-idolatry.
  + What’s the point of the cross? It is not just to save us from death, but save us from our sinful, selfish, self-absord selves right now. Christ died to deliver us from the bondage of living for ourselves.
  + Remarkable that God has given this “ministry of reconciliation”(v. 18) to…of all people…*to us*.
* Paul models this appealing by “imploring” us to be reconciled.
* v. 21 – one of the clearest, most concise statements about this ministry of reconciliation. “God made him (Christ) who had no sin (sinless!) to be sin for us (to die in our place), so that in him (those who are saved and trust in him) we might become the righteousness of God (we are given his perfect, sinless righteousness).”

What is an ambassador?

“The job of an ambassador is to represent someone or something. Everything he does and says must intentionally represent a leader who is not physically present. His calling is not limited to forty hours a week, to certain state events, or to times of international crisis. He is always the king’s representative. He stands in the place of the king wherever he is, whatever he is doing. His relationships are not primarily driven by his own happiness. He decides to go places and do things because they will help him to faithfully represent the king. Thus the work of an ambassador is incarnational. His actions, character, and words embody the king who is not present.

Paul says that God has called us all to function as his ambassadors. Our lives do not belong to us for our own fulfillment. The primary issues is, “How can I best represent the King in this place, with this particular person?” This is not a part-time calling; it is a lifestyle. When an ambassador assumes his responsibilities, his life ceases to be his own. Everything he says and does has import because of the king he represents. Anything less is an affront to the king and a denial of the ambassadorial calling.” (p. 104).

To be an ambassador means we represent God’s words, actions, and character to all those he has put in your life. What is God calling you to in your marriage? To be an ambassador. What is he calling you to in your job? To be an ambassador. What is he calling you in your parenting? To be an ambassador. What is he calling you to in this church? To be an ambassador. What is he calling you to in your relationship with friends, relatives, and neighbors? To be an ambassador. You are an ambassador in every part of your life!

A good way to summarize this ambassadorial life is to say, as an ambassador, I represent:

1. The *message* of the King. An ambassador is always asking, “What does my Lord want to communicate to this person in this situation? What truths should shape my response? What goals should motivate me?”
2. The *methods* of the King. Here I will ask, “How does the Lord bring change in me and in others? How did he respond to people here on earth? What responses are consistent with the goals and resources of the gospel?”
3. The *character* of the King. Here I ask, “Why does the Lord do what he does? How can I faithfully represent the character that motivates his redemptive work? What motives in my own heart could hinder what the Lord wants to do in this situation?”

**Relevance for Everyday Life (and not just Crisis)**

Is biblical counseling relevant for everyday life? My emphatic answer is “YES!” BC might conjure up images of being an ER doc helping people in crisis. While it’s true that is much of what you do, it is not limited to emergencies only.

Discipleship is the larger category we see in Scripture that describes one Christian relating to another Christian with the intent of helping them grow in Christ. What is biblical counseling? If we were to think about the things we deal with in discipling as a continuum, biblical counseling are those things we find on one end of the continuum that hardest, most difficult things we face in discipling. i.e., suicidical thinking, eating disorders, marital conflict, struggles with internet porn or other addictions, etc.

What I don’t want you do is to walk away from our time and think that biblical counseling is only for crisis or emergencies. The principles we will talk about in our times together are very relevant for everyday life.

Example: Your teenager (10-years-of-age) comes home with a sad look on his face. He retreats to his room and doesn’t say a word to you. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to know that something is up. How do you deal with this situation? [OPEN UP FOR COMMENTS]

Questions You Ask: Boys (generally speaking) are much harder to get to talk or be vulnerable compared to girls. But a few simple questions can get the ball rolling, like, “What’s wrong?” or “Are you okay?” or “Did something happen today at school?” or “Why are sulking?” Common sense helps you ask some basic questions. But as you come to find out the problem (fear of man; coveting of new sneakers; idolatry), it becomes harder to ask question to draw out the fear of man (i.e., his friends) and idolatry.

Understanding Your Son:

Your goal is not *just* to ask questions, but dig down into your son’s heart; going down to the level of motivation (if you can). Ideally, a conversation might look like this…

Dad: Hey buddy, what's wrong?

Son: Nothing (*you are not surprised by this response, are you?*)

Dad: Really? Nothing is wrong? Then why did you walk in the door sulking, throw your back pack on the floor and stomp up to your bedroom like you wanted to make sure everyone in the house knew that you are home and you are angry.

Son: I'm just annoyed *at some guys* at school [possibly note the potential early signs of blame-shifting].

Dad: Why, what happened?

Son: There were some boys who all just got the new Air Jordons [coveting] and they were making fun of me because *you* [more blame shifting] got me the Air Gordons from Wal-Mart.

Dad: I'm so sorry son, that is never a fun experience. So how did that make you feel when they were making fun of you?

Son: I don't know. I guess I didn't really care.

Dad: Are you sure, because it seems like we wouldn't be talking about it now if you didn't care. Did it make you sad?

Son: Yeah, and I guess it made me angry too.

Dad: Why, what were you angry about?

Son: It was embarrassing because other kids were around. [fear of man]

Dad: Why does that matter what other people think?

Son: It just does. It makes everything a lot easier when people like you. [idolatry of his friends’ opinion or self-idolatry]

etc., etc., etc.

Keeping in mind that getting a 10-year-old to be self-reflective not an enormous task because that’s not normal for most 10-year-olds. That being said, as a parent, you want to understand what’s going on his heart. After a few questions, you come to understand he is jealous of several of his friends who just got the latest release of a classic Nike air-Jordan sneaker.

Do you see the categories that become relevant for your conversation: *Blame-shifting* – blames dad for his troubles; *Fear of man* – his friends will look down on him because he has old sneakers, and they have the newest, latest, fanciest brand; *coveting* – he wants what someone else has and he does not have; *idolatry* – he wants to look better in his friend’s eyes, and feel better about himself.

He is basically worshipping himself – self-absorbed; cares more about dad spending a bazillion dollars to impress his friends than anything else; self-idolatry, subtle though it is to tease this out, especially for a teenager!

Applying the Bible: Psalm 56 (not fearing man; trusting God); Exodus 20:17 (not coveting your neighbor’s stuff); Isaiah 44 (the ridiculous nature of idolatry); Prov 15:3; 27:19 (your heart is reflected in your countenance); 1 Sam 16:7 (the Lord cares about the heart; not outward appearances).