

Resources for Life Change

(Resources are available in the Grace Resource Center)

The Grace Resource Center has many new resources available for you. From Bibles, to parenting books, to marriage and family books, to books on issues in Biblical Counseling, to children's books, to books about Christian living and theology, the Resource Center provides a whole variety of very helpful resources for you. Stop by the Resource Center today, before and after all church services.

1. Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth, edited by James MacDonald, James Viars, Robert Kelleman, and David Powlison

Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling is a comprehensive guide that will equip God's people to use biblical truth to change lives. More than that, this book will increase people's confidence in the sufficiency and relevancy of God's Word to address real-life issues in a multitude of counseling situations. Readers of this book will: Understand clearly why they should embrace biblical counseling Be encouraged to trust God's Word to provide rich insight for living in the midst of even the most difficult challenges. Enjoy the relevant, pastoral, and theological teaching they have come to appreciate from such noted authors as James MacDonald, John Piper, Mark Dever, and Elyse Fitzpatrick. The 28 chapters blend theological wisdom and practical expertise. The first half of the book emphasizes a practical theology of biblical counseling; the second half highlights a practical methodology of biblical counseling.

2. Good Mood, Bad Mood, Dr. Charles D. Hodges, M.D.

Depression and bipolar disorder are two of the most common diagnoses made in medicine today. In this book, Dr. Hodges examines whether it is an epidemic or if we have simply changed how we label depression. While medication is now the commonly accepted way to deal with pain and sadness, its promise has not been fulfilled. Dr. Charles Hodges shows us the importance of sadness, considers the help available, and directs us to the hope that God gives in His Word.

3. Comforts From Romans, by Elyse Fitzpatrick

Although we may go to bed at night believing the gospel, we wake up every morning needing to hear it again. Yet most of us don't have time to dive into a lengthy commentary on the book of Romans—the book Paul wrote in order to showcase the glorious riches of the gospel. Thankfully seasoned counselor and author Elyse Fitzpatrick makes the message of Romans readily accessible in 31 devotional-like chapters on what Martin Luther called "the very purest Gospel." Perfect for even the busiest of us, Elyse helps us grasp the practicality of the gospel message and experience the deep comforts articulated in the book of Romans.

Q&A continued —

The goal: In today's world, people focus on 'feeling good'. We believe we have a 'right' to always feel good. But this should not be the primary goal of a Christian. Our goal, which is found in 2 Cor. 5:9 and 1 Cor. 10:31, is to please and honor God in our responses to all situations. One systematic but simple way of looking at this is what I call the 'quadratic' formula because it has four parts:

Believe right -think right-do right-feel right.

It starts with believing right about who God is, what is the gospel and what is our goal in life as a Christian. If we believe right, then this will guide our desires and our thinking. Proper desires and thoughts will guide our actions (i.e. doing right) and this leads to feeling right: the peace and joy of pleasing God and the joy of our salvation. Even in the midst of sorrow or sadness over loss, we can have this joy.

So is it ever necessary to take antidepressants? No, the tack can be removed without them. Despite the fancy displays by the pharmaceutical companies, there is no proof that a chemical imbalance exists in the synapses of the brain. Most AD Rx are theorized to increase serotonin and other neurotransmitters, however there is an equally effective medication that is thought to decrease the amount of serotonin. The exact mechanism of these drugs is unknown, and unproven (depression is not a proven physiological disease).

Considering all this, is it ok for a Christian to take antidepressant meds? I would say yes, its 'ok', but it is only 'ok'. There is a far superior answer. It is turning to God's Word for the answers to life's problems. As Dr. Bob Smith points out, we can have victory even in difficult circumstances. Victory is:

- Being focused on God's purposes for the trial more than on the agony of the trial
- Not only to find relief, but to please God, treasure Christ and live for Him. The love of Christ is to control us (2 Cor. 5:14).
- To glorify God by yielding to His good, acceptable and perfect will—to meet the challenges of life with humility.
- To be controlled by the desire to grow in Christian maturity through our trials: to develop endurance, rest and peace in Christ, and in faith in God's control.
- Not grieving as those who have no hope.

Victory is found in Jesus, our Lord and Savior, comforter and friend!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: The Community of Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry and the editor of the monthly newsletter welcome letters from the readers. Letters may be edited if the editorial team deems it necessary to do so to fit the space allowed or due to unbiblical communication practices. We encourage the reader to write with edification in mind. Letters must be signed. Names can be withheld upon request. If you have a question about counseling that you would like to ask for future publications feel free to submit those questions to Pastor Blake Shaw.



THE COG COMMUNITY OF GRACE Biblical Counseling Ministry

Edition #18 — March 2013



Biblical Counseling - Turning to God's Word for the Answers to Life's Problems Biblical Counseling Conference

July 25-27, 2013 at Grace Bible Church

Some Topics Covered:

- Why Counsel: Every Member's Role
- What Makes Biblical Counseling Biblical?
- Shyness and Social Anxiety
- Dealing with Suicide
- Killing Pride
- Prayer: Tapping Into the Real Power for Change
- Medical Issues in Counseling
- Handling Abuse Cases
- Desperate Parents Make the Best Parents
- Romans 8:28
- Understanding Grace and Repentance
- How To Make Sure Your Counseling Doesn't Produce a Pharisee

Speakers:

**Brad Bigney, Rob Green,
Aaron Sironi, Chris Moles,
Bryan Hughes, Brad Wright,
Dan & Pam Gannon**

Registrations Forms are available at the Grace Bible Church office, at the Resource Center or you can register online at: <http://gbcmt.org/ministries/biblical-counseling/the-conference> ~ Early Registration Deadline is April 30th, 2013.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Pastor Blake Shaw

Have you ever stopped and pondered the "One Another Commands" of the New Testament? I'm guessing some of our readers have. Most of us can name a few of these "One Anothers" and by my observation many of us actually practice a number of them. One of the joys I have found in serving as a pastor at Grace Bible Church is seeing God's people here in our church family obeying Jesus Christ and taking serious the commands related to the phrase, "one another." As with any church family, we have our flaws, or, as I wrote about last month, "our bad breath," but many people at GBC really work hard at practicing the "one another commands." When the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 13 about leadership and those who follow, he spoke of leaders who lead with joy, not with grief. When God's people practice the "one anothers" this is a cause for great joy in the hearts of leaders. So let me say (and I think I speak for the whole of those in spiritual leadership here), "Thank you to so many of you for being obedient to Christ and truly caring for one another."

Let's turn the page now to consider perhaps one of the hardest and least practiced "One Another Commands." A study of this command will be a perfect segue to a future article about praying for one another. Let me ask you: "Have you ever had a time where you were really struggling with some particular sin?" You know, it is one of those sins that seems like it is almost the Achilles heel issue for you. It really has you tripped up and limping along in your Christian walk. Perhaps it is one of those sins tucked into your heart that no one knows about but you and God. Perhaps it is a sin that those who are closest to you know about but others merely know you by what they see on Sunday morning when you walk through the doors of the church. Perhaps it is one of those "Respectable

Sins" (as Jerry Bridges calls it) or one of those sins that is so "common to man" that we assume that everyone struggles with, so we just accept it as fact and get on with life. Does God let us get off the hook that easily? Should we just "get on with life" and "just accept" our sin as fact? Scripture indicates that we are to "confess our sins to one another" in James 5:16. From this command, and especially in light of the context in which it is given, we learn that mutual honesty, genuine openness, and personal sharing of life should be the norm for true body life among believers.

A number of years ago, I was deeply discouraged in life. In fact, I was borderline depressed. I was still carrying out my weekly responsibilities in ministry and I would head home to my wife and kids and do the things that dads do in the evening when little kids are crawling around on the floor, putting their fingers into light-sockets, etc. I was physically wiped out, to be sure, so that wasn't really helping my battle against discouragement. But there was something else at work in my life beyond the pressures of ministry and the challenges of being a dad to a newborn and one year old. You see, at work in my heart was a battle with bitterness against a man who had made some false accusations against a fellow pastor, actually trying to drive him from the ministry. I knew the man and I knew the pastor very well and, though the accusations against the pastor were found to be false, I was gripped by anger. Although this anger started out as righteous anger, it soon grew to be an unrighteous bitterness that ripped at my soul. Perhaps that is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:26, "Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath..." The initial anger was not the problem. It was the on-going anger that began to work its way into my heart. Day after day I found myself pondering what this man had done.

Continued on top of next page ➡

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Continued from cover page —

Sometimes I would lie awake at night or even wake up in the middle of the night thinking about this man's aggressive attempts to drive my pastor friend from his ministry. Whenever I saw this man, or anyone acquainted with him, or even someone who reminded me of him- or when I drove by his subdivision, there was an intense worm of anger, bitterness, and hatred stirring in my heart. And in the midst of this I was getting more and more discouraged about life. And then it happened. One day while having lunch with a close friend of mine, I shared with him about the battle in my heart. He knew about the situation also and had found himself at times angry about this too, but, unlike me, he had responded rightly. When I told him the reality of my ongoing struggle it was his opportunity to pray with and for me at that moment. It was his opportunity to encourage me to turn the situation over to a just God, One who avenges. It was his opportunity to exhort me to remember that God is a good God who is at work to shape and mold His people into the image of Christ and that work involves times of trials and heartache. That day, discouragement left my heart. Oh, to be sure, there have been days of discouragement since that time, but the discouragement of that era was one that was day-in and day-out with no vacation and that evaporated from my heart when I humbled myself and confessed my sin to another believer.

In the context of James 5, James is talking about those who are sick, which I believe is a reference to those who are weakened by means of the suffering they are experiencing. After all, James was writing to a group of people who were in the throes of amazing suffering for their faith. And so the "sick" person is directed by James to call the spiritual leaders of the church to come and to strengthen, support, and pray for him. And it is in this context where James says, "...Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..."

I needed to deal with my anger, bitterness, and hatred, not by listening to a comedian, or by going to a concert, or by listening to a great sermon. I needed to deal with these issues of the heart by stepping into the light, confessing them, first to God (I John 1), and then by confessing them to a fellow believer. It was in that moment when I began to see a reprieve from the discouragement that wreaked havoc in my life.

What about you? First, how do you react to this concept of "confessing your sins to others?" If you are like most Christians,

your initial reaction is, "No way. I'd never share that with someone." Or, "Are you kidding me? If I shared that with a fellow believer, I'd be kicked out of the church or that person would go and share that with others and then everyone would know." Or, "It's my own private sin issue that no one knows about and no one needs to know because I am not hurting anyone else." I can appreciate the hesitation one has to the concept of confessing sins to others. Wisdom and discernment is needed when considering to whom we confess our sins. I wonder though if we believers have become so private, so withdrawn, so removed from one another that we don't know one another well enough to know who to trust and who not to trust. Perhaps that is the "bad breath" of our church family. Think about it. We all know we are sinful. We all know that the sin that we struggle with is "common to man" (I Corinthians 10:13). We all know that we desperately need Jesus. So why do we keep from confessing our sins to one another? Perhaps it is pride. I recently told a person who came to me for counseling that there is nothing he can share with me about his struggles that will shock me or that would make my "jaw hit the floor" in utter amazement. We understand sin. We understand how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts can be. We grieve over sin but we are not shocked. Perhaps we find ourselves functioning like a group of teenagers who are sneaking around hiding their sin, humored by the thought that they are getting away with something. All the while, God knows each action, each word, each thought and with each step one is setting a pattern for the rest of his life. And God says, "Confess your sins to one another."

What about you? Is there some sin in your life that you struggle with daily and it is slowly hardening your heart (see Hebrews 3:12-13)? Do you need to take the humble step and sit down with someone and say, "My friend, I want to share with you something and I desperately need your prayers. For days, weeks, months, or even years, I have been struggling with a particular sin. It has such a grip on my life that my joy is zapped, even my strength is gone. I struggle to pray, to sing songs of worship, to even be with other believers because of this sin. Can you pray with and for me?" What might that kind of "walk in the light" do to your walk with the Lord and your relationship with others? I have an idea that if you are interacting with the right people, you will find that they will reciprocate; they too will open up their life, and you can pray for one another.

Speaking of "praying for one another," that's the topic for next month's newsletter. Until then, keep it real. Be discerning, but join me in walking in the light.

THE COUNSELING ZONE: This month in the COG we continue to hear from several more individuals and couples who attended the Biblical Counseling Training conference in Lafayette, Indiana. Here are some follow-up letters/notes that were submitted:

Thank you so much for sending Sarah and me to the Faith counseling conference. When you asked us to go I looked at Sarah and said we don't need to go learn to be counselors we need counseling. I had no intention of ever becoming a counselor. But days before we were to leave and go to the conference, I had an old acquaintance call up and need to talk. He called again while we were at the conference. Whether I like it or not God wants me to talk to people about the Gospel and what He can do in their lives. But mostly I think God wanted me to hear what was taught and apply it to my own life. Thank you again for sending us.
~Shane

The Biblical Counseling Committee:

Chairman: Pastor Blake Shaw, Vice-Chair: Dr. Dan Gannon
Members: Ty Typolt, Pam Gannon, Brad Wright,
Pastor Kelly Jennaway, and Jim Tesseneer

Some might say going to the conference in Lafayette is like drinking from a fire hydrant for 5 days. Yet in all reality it is an opportunity to drink from the living waters of the word of God. Ever want to know how the Scriptures can be used to help a victim of abuse, broken marriage, depressed friend...how to love the person who has just lost a child or spouse? It is my passion to better understand how to help the hurting and going to the conference puts more tools in my belt for me to use in my personal ministry. Is there a perfect formula for helping people? No there isn't. Each person and situation is unique. Yet it starts with love. A love for people and the knowledge that the great physician, Jesus, gave us His Word to help the people He places in our path.

This conference isn't just for those who want to counsel. It is also for people who want to better understand how to use God's Word to help those around them. During a session my mind disengaged a bit and I read a little book about helping those who are grieving. It was called, "Did I say the Wrong Thing." Wow in about 30 minutes I was so encouraged and challenged in this area. I was always afraid to approach someone who had just experienced the loss of a loved one. I didn't want to say something that would make them feel worse. Can you relate? Head knowledge is important but how to apply it to our lives is just as vital. Hope this gives you a sliver of what we experienced and that others will either join next year or attend the Biblical Counseling Conference at our own church in July.
~Dominique Shaw

Q&A with Dr. Dan Gannon

Question: Several months ago, we were given a question that has several parts to it. In the editions of the COG in December and January, we dealt with the first aspect of the question. This month and next month we'll deal with the last part of the question and that is related to how we would respond to issues of Biblical Counseling's perspective on science and the use of medications. This month, Dr. Dan Gannon addresses the oft-asked-question: "Is it okay to take anti-depressant drugs?"

Answer: This is a frequently asked question in Biblical Counseling. It is 'hot potato' topic, filled with controversy, lacking consensus, and eliciting strong emotional responses whether your answer would be yes, no, or maybe. Godly people disagree on this topic. In many, maybe even most, cases these are sincere people looking for relief from real pain and loss and sincere people trying to help them. We would acknowledge that many people are on medication and so this decision has already been made. This article is not giving medical advice and any reader who happens to be taking any medication should always consult their physician before altering any of their medications.

No matter what our individual opinions are, we should be respectful of those who hold a different view. Ultimately each of us is accountable to the Lord for the perspective we hold.

There is a wide spectrum of opinions even among medical providers regarding use of these antidepressant drugs (AD Rx). The spectrum ranges from always use them to never use them. On one end of the spectrum would be those who think antidepressants should be used in all cases of depression and for the duration of the person's lifetime. Some would use the meds temporarily in all cases, or occasionally for a lifetime. Next on the spectrum are those who would use the medications sometimes and temporarily. Finally, on the other end of the spectrum, are those who would never prescribe them.

Many people in today's culture are described by or diagnosed with 'depression'. Biblical terms for this emotional situation include 'downcast', 'despair', 'grief', 'sorrow' or 'sadness.' Dr. Charles Hodges points out in his book, "**Good Mood, Bad Mood**" that it is important to distinguish between

'normal sadness' and 'disordered sadness.' Normal sadness is a response to loss or severe trials. Disordered sadness has no identifiable loss or trial. The term 'depression' is most appropriately used for 'disordered sadness', while sadness over loss is a normal God-given emotion.

The intensity and duration of sadness varies with the circumstances. For example, if we lost our cell phone we would be sad and maybe even cry. If our fiancé said "NO" the day before the wedding, we would be sad for a much longer time. If a parent lost a child to cancer or suicide, the sadness would be prolonged and intense. Yet even in all these situations of sadness, the sufferer can still glorify God. Should any of the people in the above three examples take anti-depressant drugs? I would say no. Sadness is a tool that God will use to speak to us if we are willing to listen. The emotion can drive us to seek God and His comfort (2 Corinthians 1). The church body should come alongside those with normal sadness and 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15). We should wrap the sufferer in the arms of the body of Christ.

In today's culture, it has been proposed that up to 90 % of those taking antidepressant drugs fall into the category of 'normal sadness'.

A related question often asked is, "Do antidepressant drugs work?" One way to approach this question is to ask another question: "Define what you mean by 'work'". These medications do have effects and side effects (although some researchers believe that up to 80% of the therapeutic effects are placebo). They do tend to blunt affect (reduce emotional highs and lows). But if the goal of our lives is to grow in Christ-likeness, do these medications work toward that goal? That is, do they change the heart in the way that God desires, so that people are becoming more like Christ? (James 1:2-3; Eph. 4:22-24; Romans 12:1-2, etc.). The answer to that question is, no.

There are other things to consider. One of these is potential side effects of these medications. Although the SSRI's class of AD Rx was developed to have fewer side effects, the positive effect of improved mood sometimes progresses to low level mania (hypomania). This may lead to a diagnosis of Bipolar II, for which additional medications may be prescribed. SSRI's can also have the opposite effect of worsening depression or suicid-

al thoughts especially in younger people. Also, the cost can be considerable. Are these medications a financial burden to the family? When might it be appropriate to use AD Rx or other mood altering (psychotropic) drugs? There are conditions where psychotropic drugs could be considered to be helpful;

1. Recurrent mania of Bipolar I;
2. Severe psychosis, delusions, perception disorders (schizophrenia);
3. Behavior that is physically harmful to self or others;
4. Chronic severe sleep deprivation;
5. Disordered sadness, resistant to counsel.

In all the above cases the medication should always be accompanied by godly biblical counsel because the answers to our soul maladies are found only in the Word of God.

Is it sinful to take AD Rx? No, not always, but yes it could be. If we put our hope in medication to change us and address our heart issues, instead of putting our hope in God and His word, then that is worshipping something other than God, which is idolatry. Dr. Mike Emlett points out that some Christians are better evangelists for Prozac than they are for God and the sufficiency of His Word. AD Rx do not address issues of the heart, nor sinful responses to life's trials.

Let me provide you with the "Tack analogy": When people ask about the use of AD Rx for any situation. I like to draw an analogy to sitting on a tack. If you sit on a tack, it hurts! So you could use medications such as Tylenol to reduce the pain, and it would help. But if you continue to sit on the tack, it will continue to hurt, and you will need larger doses of medications, or additional medications such as ibuprofen or even morphine. If the tack remains for a long time you may develop an infection, in which case an antibiotic would be used. Now you are on 4 different meds, all of which could have side effects, and you might need other medications to counteract these side effects. But what is the superior solution? Stand up, identify the tack, and pull it out. Even when you pull the tack out it may continue to hurt for a while, but it will heal. In this analogy, the tack is the heart issue that the medications cannot address. The medications can only blunt the symptoms. Only God's Word can help you identify and remove the tack.

Q&A continued on rear page ⇨