

# The Counseling Zone

By Pastor Blake Shaw



Over a number of months we have been taking a look at the key elements to the biblical counseling process. We have seen that for counseling to be successful, one must establish a relationship with the person being counseled. The counselor must build what we call, "involvement." This could also be akin to "building passport into the person's life." As a counseling ministry we have to keep in mind that not everyone who seeks counsel is someone that we know. In fact, I would envision a time in the future when we have developed our counseling ministry to our desired level so that most of us who do counseling will most likely be counseling people whom we have never met. It is in those situations where we must work hardest to build involvement. Once we establish a working relationship, we begin the in-depth, sometimes arduous (difficult/tiring) process of gathering data. We must hear the story before we dole out an answer. If we don't, we just might be practicing folly and shame (Proverbs 18:13).

After we have gathered the data by means of much questioning, we look at our data and interpret it in order to determine what the real issues are for which the person needs counseling.

Let me pause here and say that if we fail to gather the full extent of the data our counseling will fail. I reflect back over the number of years I have been counseling and realize that many of my failures as a counselor were related to lack of gathering the complete data.

Another key element to biblical counseling is Inspiration. You see, every time we counsel someone we MUST give hope. No person should leave the counseling room without some form of biblical hope. And so we not only build involvement, do investigation, interpret the data, we also work hard to give the person inspiration that is founded in Christ.

Next, biblical counseling would not be biblical counseling if we did not bring what is called, "Instruction" into the counseling room. Instruction is where we open up God's Word and help the person see God's solution to their problem(s). The authority of biblical counseling is God's Word, so we must get the person into the Bible (or better said, get the Bible into the person).

Last month I began to examine the next key element of the biblical counseling process. That key element is called, "Inducement". What I have in mind with the word "inducement" is simply that as a biblical counselor I want to attempt to persuade, motivate, and influence the counselee to make certain commitments or decisions that will facilitate change in his life. Throughout Scripture God's people are called upon to go God's Way. We saw various examples of this from the pages of Scripture in last month's article. The one I will reiterate is Romans 12:1 where the Apostle Paul says, "I beseech you therefore brethren..." Paul is seeking to induce the readers of his letter to go God's way, or to quote Paul, "to present their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." And from that point on Paul gives the readers specific commands of how a Christian should live his life.

Last month I highlighted five (of nine) kinds of commitments the Biblical Counselor should seek to induce the counselee to make. Let me list them here: 1) To make the Bible their final authority. Since we believe the Bible has the answers and that it is our Creator's word to us, we want to get the counselee to make the same commitment, 2) To trust and rely on Christ alone, not self or other people, for the grace and resources needed to make the changes God wants them to make, 3) To accept full responsibility for all that is unbiblical in their life. We look at their motives, their thoughts, their actions, their feelings, and we want the person to take full responsibility for anything that is unbiblical, 4) To view sin as God views it. This is such a monumental issue because our world has developed a whole system of labels that we can slap on almost any sin we deal with. So we re-label things all the time, using biblical labels. We call sin, sin, and finally, 5) To be concerned about internal sin as well as external sin. We aren't just dealing with external sins or behavior. We are dealing with what is going on in the heart of the person. Many people end up in counseling because of behavior and it is easy to simply want to deal with behavior and miss the root of the problem. So when we induce/incite the person to go God's way, we want them to understand that for true change to happen, they must be willing to deal with what is going on in their thinking and in their worship. Let me note for you several other things that we seek to induce the counselee to make a commitment to:

1. To be set free from the sin, not just the unpleasant consequences caused by the sin. Certainly, many of us have experienced the consequences of some sinful choice we made in our past. Sometimes the consequences can be brutally difficult to deal with. Many people come for counseling and they are hoping that somehow the counselor will pull off a miracle and be able to remove the consequences. And sometimes, because of compassion, we might want, more than anything, to be able to do just that. We can't. And oftentimes the counselee has to experience the consequences. But we can help them understand that they can live in freedom from the sin that got them in the problem in the first place.

2. To forsake all other gods and worship and serve and obey God alone. Every counseling issue is related to worship. John Calvin spoke of the human heart being a perpetual idol factory, always seeking to produce some god that we can worship in the place of the true God. So, in counseling, we are striving to compel the counselee to forsake the other gods and to worship the true God in spirit and in truth in every avenue of life.

3. To do all that is necessary to actually work on changing the things in their life that are displeasing to God. You see, a goal of our counseling is to get the person to a place where they live to please God in all areas of their life. We challenge a person to do his part in bringing about change in the areas that are displeasing to God. But not everyone wants to work at change. We've probably all bumped into a person who wants the situation in life to change for them, while at the same time, not to have to do any work in the process. Sometimes we have to provide a biblical rationale to the person for why they have to do some level of work in order for their life to change.

4. Last, we seek to induce the person to commit to adopting God's agenda for his life. It might surprise you but most people who come in for counseling are not committed to the same agenda that the biblical counselor is. The biblical counselor must be committed to God's agenda; otherwise he no longer offers biblical counseling. Likewise, the counselee must be compelled to be going the same direction.

Most people who seek counsel are hoping you can help them get free from the consequences, the circumstances of life, or to even fix the other person that they are in conflict with. Some are seeking counseling to merely ease their conscience while others still are hoping you can give them some ways to justify something in their life. So we find ourselves often explaining that we are simply providing God's solution to their answers, thus, they have to be committed to God's agenda. As I reflect on my counseling experience and the times I have failed as a counselor, I can usually point back to the issue of inducement, where I first failed to make sure that the counselee(s) was committed to the nine areas listed above. 20/20 hindsight is golden, isn't it?

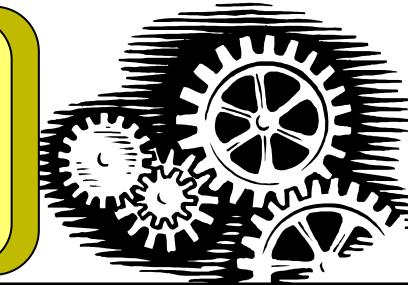
A natural question could possibly be asked at this juncture and that is, "How does a counselor go about 'inducing' the counselee in these areas?" I would suppose there are many methods and approaches to doing this but perhaps the best one I have observed is seen where the counselor explains to the person his approach to counseling and he simply reiterates the main points spelled out above. For example, I know some counselors would say something like this, "Well, let me explain a little about my approach to counseling just so you know what you are getting into. In our counseling here, the Bible is our final authority. So we will study it. As we do this we challenge you the counselee to take full responsibility for your own life, to be careful to not blame others or circumstances for what you do in life. We also will bump into the issue of sin and so in our counseling we view sin as God views it. So I will strive to always give your sin a biblical label. Not only that but in our counseling we are concerned with both external conduct/behavior and internal issues. So when we strive to help you change we will counsel about what you think about and worship and desire, as well as what you do in your life. You see, we want you to have God's agenda for your life so it will take some work to bring about change. Does that make sense and are you agreeable to this?" At that juncture we have received a commitment from the counselee to go God's way.

One of the striking realities of doing biblical counseling is that we, as counselors, are often challenged to evaluate our own lives. It is a reality that if we are not doing something that God wants us to do, it is virtually impossible, with a clear conscience to be calling another to do what God wants him to do. And so, biblical counselor, I end this article with an opportunity for you to examine yourself. Place a checkmark in the box if it is true of you.

- The Bible really is my final authority?
- I trust and rely on Christ alone?
- I take full responsibility for our own life and do not blame others and circumstances for why I do what I do?
- I view sin as God views it?
- I am as concerned about what is going on internally as I am with my external sin?
- I seek to be free from sin, not just the unpleasant consequences caused by sin?
- I actively forsake all other gods and worship, serve, and obey God alone?
- I actively work on changing the things that are displeasing to God in my own life?
- I seek to live life on God's agenda for all of the decisions I make?

## THE COG COMMUNITY OF GRACE Biblical Counseling Ministry

Edition #20 — May 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

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<http://gbcmt.org/ministries/biblical-counseling/the-conference>

### Speakers:

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

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT BY GUEST WRITER: TANA DEVINE



and serving others, or jealousy and envy of those who are "doing well" or don't have similar afflictions. There could also be the temptation of turning to alcohol, drugs, shopping or eating to "numb" or distract oneself from pain. In other words, suffering can lead to a whole host of complicating sins. So what can we do when we find ourselves in this state or what do we do to help others who are in this condition? James tells us to PRAY! One thing to point out is that it is the responsibility of the one suffering to humble himself, confess sins, and call for others to pray. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of those who are called to pray with faith and with fervency!

Before I discuss praying for others, I would like to comment on the receiving side of this command. As many of you know, my husband Jack has been fighting a four year battle with cancer. During this whole ordeal, we have been the recipients of countless people's prayers. When others are praying for you it makes all the difference. I always have this overwhelming feeling of gratitude and such a sense of appreciation when others tell us that they are praying for our family. In addition to my husband's health challenges, I have been struggling with a "besetting" sin for several years. I have sought to practice what Pastor Blake has exhorted us to do by humbling myself and confessing my sin to certain close brothers and sisters in Christ who have prayed fervently for me. As never before, the Lord has been helping me to walk in obedience and victory in this area.

Have you ever gone through deep waters, agonizing difficulties or a life dominating sin and received fervent prayer from the body of Christ? If you have, you know what Scripture means when it says that prayer "avails much." In addition to being prayed for over the past 6 months, I have also been called to pray for others like never before. As I have sought to exercise obedience to God's command to pray for others, I have been learning many things. I present them here and in the next month's COG in hopes that they will be an encouragement to you to love others well through fervent prayer.

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# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Continued from cover page —

First, prayer is an amazing privilege and a God-given responsibility. It is a privilege because through prayer we have direct access to God's throne of grace 24 hours a day. In Jesus' last conversation with His disciples which is recorded in John 14-17 He told them multiple times that they were to "ask in His name" and it would be done so that the Father would be glorified, they would bear much fruit, and their joy would be made full. We are not the power or source of anything in God's kingdom; however, He has graciously chosen to allow us to be a part of His work here on earth through prayer. What an amazing privilege! God has also made us a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) with the responsibility of praying for one another. As counselor and speaker Brad Bigney says, "We are not manufacturers; just distributors. We are dependent on Him. Lack of prayer is a tell-tale sign that we are depending on our own wisdom or strength; it is putting our confidence in the flesh." Those we live with, love, pray for, and counsel, need an encounter with the living God and we can't do that! Through prayer we acknowledge our desperate need for God's work to be done and our complete inability to change a person's heart or circumstances.

Third, the verse says, "The effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much." We do not come to the throne of grace because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. It is through Jesus and His work of redemption completed on the cross that we are made righteous and it is in the name of Jesus that we now come to God in prayer. To pray in His name means that we pray according to His will, and consistent with His nature, character, and purposes. As we seek to live a righteous life, our greatest desire will be to glorify and please our Father. Suffice it to say, that if we have known unrepentant sin in our life, we are not living the righteous life that God desires. Ps. 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." We must walk humbly with our Father, keeping short accounts, and confessing and repenting of known sin in our lives. We can't fake it with God. Prayer is a person-to-God encounter to whom all things are open and laid bare (Hebrews 4:13).

Secondly, this responsibility of prayer requires energy, hard work, self-discipline, and perseverance. The word effectual or fervent in James 5 comes from the Greek word *energeo* which means to work, be active, or to produce an effect or result. The KJV uses two words to capture the idea: "The effectual fervent prayer." This isn't your basic, "Lord, please bless so and so" kind of prayer. It is prayer propelled by a sense of urgency and wrought by the operation of the Holy Spirit

(cf. Rom. 8:26, 27). It is praying with an intense and impassioned plea for God to do His work. This is also prayer with perseverance that keeps asking, keeps seeking, and keeps knocking (see Math. 7:7). Jesus tells a parable in Luke 18:1-8 teaching us "that at all times (we) ought to pray and not lose heart." Look at the words Jesus uses to describe prayer in this passage: "at all times," "not lose heart," "continually coming," and "who cry to Him day and night." All of these terms describe the effectual fervent prayer that James refers to. Col. 4:12 says of Ephesians that he is, "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers." How about you?

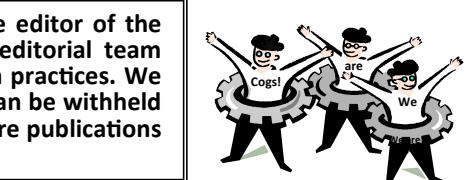
How often have you come before the Lord God in this manner on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ? Sometimes suffering is short lived, but most often it continues over a long period of time. And for those who are seeking to change a habitual pattern of sin, this doesn't happen overnight either. If you have never prayed this way or it is the exception rather than the norm, ask the Lord to give you a desire and a burden to pray with fervency and then be prepared to go to work!

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves, to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." And Jesus states in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." Our God-given responsibility to pray is not only a great honor and privilege, it demonstrates our love for others and our humility and dependence upon God.

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I encourage you to give these questions some serious consideration and do what the Lord shows you to improve your prayer and love for others. I would like to end with a short paragraph from Charles Spurgeon since it expresses my own thoughts so well:

**"Do you always pray for others? Do you think you have taken the case of your children, your church, your neighborhood, and the ungodly world before God as you should have done? If you have, I have not. I write this as a chief culprit before the Master to make confession of the sin, and while I shall exhort you to practice what is undoubtedly a noble privilege, I shall be most of all exhorting myself" (The Power of Prayer in a Believer's Life).**



**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.

## Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

**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. In March, Dr. Dan Gannon addressed the oft-asked-question: "Is it okay to take anti-depressant drugs?" Last month I began to address the issue about whether Biblical Counseling is anti-science or not. The question put forward is, "How do you respond to the charge that Biblical Counseling is 'Anti-science'?"

**Answer:** As I stated in the previous article (see April's edition of the COG), Biblical Counselors are very much pro-science when the science is done well, when it is done for the glory of God, and when it is indeed true science. In that article I delineated the difference between Descriptive psychology and Prescriptive psychology. The distinction between those two is absolutely critical for our discussion here.

For last month's article I stirred the proverbial hornet's nest and wrote about the issue of mental illness. I made the point that I do not believe there is such a thing as mental illness, as understood and defined by the psychological world. I gave several reasons why: 1) Because the psychological definition is built upon an evolutionary philosophy and theory, thus, in their thinking humans are merely more advanced in their evolution as animals; 2) Even the secular world cannot agree on a theory of mental illness and a definition of the mind; 3) As a biblical counselor I would see the brain and the mind as not being the same thing, that the brain is a vehicle for the mind, that the brain indeed can have some form of illness/disease and such disease can be detected by the current modern medical technology; and 4) That a more accurate label in place of one who is labeled by the psychiatric world as mentally ill, is the label, "mentally depraved."

It is that labeling that I want to explore. To explore this label, let's consider Adam Lanza, a young man who killed 26 people in an elementary school in Connecticut. The horrific event struck a nerve with Americans everywhere, not only because little children were killed, but because the person who did the killing seemed to be killing with a coldness and a calculation that left most people wondering, "What was wrong with him?" As a stunned nation looked on, many wondered, "What would lead a person to do something of this magnitude?" The world confidently offered up an answer stating that the young man was mentally ill. And the psychiatric world across the nation nodded in agreement that indeed, this troubled young man was certainly battling some form of mental illness. So how do we as biblical counselors approach an understanding of this young man and any other person who has been labeled as mentally ill? Let me offer some thoughts.

First, we want to pause and grieve with the families and friends of those who died in the useless tragedy in Connecticut (or any other tragedy involving a person who has been labeled mentally ill). I don't think any-

one gets over this type of event, in the sense that they ever really forget the horrendous nature of what took place. But I want to add one element that the media didn't and that has to do with what makes the school shootings (and other murders) so terribly wrong. When Adam Lanza attacked humans and killed them, he was attacking the image of God. Yes, it was bad that he was attacking humans but what made this worse still was that each human who was killed was a human created in the image of God. That is why God established from the beginning the idea of capital punishment for murder. He says in Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed..." But why? Why should the murderer have his life taken as well? God continues and says, "...For in the image of God He made man..." What makes murder so horrendous is that God's image is being attacked when a human life is attacked.

Secondly, as biblical counselors, we want to be careful about categorically stating that Adam Lanza did not have a problem with his brain. But again, keep in mind that brain problems are not "mental illnesses." The brain can have a disease, but what about the mind? Various reports stated that Lanza had a form of autism, known as Asperger Syndrome (which is a problem in the brain). Others stated that he had a personality disorder, while others stated that he had been labeled with sensory integration disorder. This label is interesting as it is one which is rejected by the medical community, and, in fact, even in the new DSM V (the psychiatrist's Bible being released this year) it is not acknowledged as a legitimate label. The point being is that there is no certainty from the psychiatric world what Adam's precise physiological/organic problem was. Clearly, there was something amiss with Adam Lanza.

Many witnesses to his life and conduct would say that socially there were some problems. Remember though (from a worldly perspective) that Adam Lanza was merely an animal. From the world's perspective, he didn't have a soul, a spirit, a conscience, etc. He had mental problems which from the world's philosophy meant that the only treatment available would be medications, probably cognitive behavioral therapy, and most likely, because of the severity of the problem, institutionalization. I'm not saying that there is never a need for someone who is a danger to others and even to himself to be placed into a safe and controlled environment. What I am saying is that the core issues that are leading to his problems will not be addressed.

Someone might be thinking, "Okay, wise guy, then why don't you state what are the answers to his problem?" As I stated last month, the Adam Lanza's of this world have a problem with mental depravity. You see, like all of us, Adam came into this world as a wretched sinner. He was born spiritually dead. From the moment of his birth his body began a slow decay, for as Paul said, "...our outer man is decaying daily" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Adam Lanza, shot through with depravity, grew up in a home

that at some juncture ended with his parents divorcing. The rudimentary effects of divorce on Adam are unknown but observation of effects divorce has on many kids does give some insight into potential struggles that Adam may have had. Reports don't tell us much about his upbringing, and we don't have a day-to-day report of how he was raised, how he was disciplined, what things were done to shape and mold his conscience (the conscience is a gift from God that tells a person right from wrong not to be confused with the Freudian unconscious). We don't know what the parenting skills were for his parents, nor do we know how he was treated by his parents or his sibling or neighbors. We don't know how he was trained to deal with anger or fear or feeling bad. But we do know that he was born a sinner in desperate need of a Savior. Depravity had shot through every element of his being, from his emotions, to his intellect, to his will. As a youngster he began to develop a certain way of thinking and responding, just like any of us. And one day, the camel's back broke. No one truly knows which straw broke it, we only get to deal with the aftermath of such a horrendous situation. Certainly, there could very well have been some issues in the brain but the brain never makes someone sin. Another way to say that is, "The physical body never causes someone to sin." Sure, it can be influential but the physical body never causes someone to sin.

In Lanza's case, the physical body, whether it was a brain issue that falls under the diagnoses of autism or some other supposed illness, his actions cannot be relegated to a disease, an illness, a syndrome.

Adam Lanza made a choice, a brutally horrific choice; a choice that is the natural outgrowth of mental depravity that was never biblically dealt with. As a biblical counselor, there is much to be considered in this situation. Could there be a physical problem that is greatly influential in situations like these? Sure. But is there really any hope if all we do is tell a person they are mentally ill and then dole out medication? No, that doesn't provide true hope. As I stated last month, Christ Jesus and His Word are all about dealing with mental depravity. There is hope when one turns to Christ and by faith submits his life - his thinking, his emotions, his will to the Lordship of Christ and then, by the power of Christ in him, begins to learn new methods of thinking and responding. He begins to break old habits and develop new and biblical habits. And as he does so, he begins to walk in newness of life. You see, Christ died for our mental depravity. Christ takes the depraved person and as we walk with him and point him to Christ's all-sufficient Word, we see that person begin to change in their thinking, their motives, their desires, their plans, their worship, and their actions.

Ah yes, it takes work. Radical change needs to take place in the person's life, to be sure. But mentally depravity, because it is an accurate label, is dealt with by Christ and His Word.

