

The Counseling Zone

By Pastor Blake Shaw



We are in a series of articles about the key elements of Biblical Counseling and last month I introduced the seventh key element: Implementation. Each of these key elements should be built into the structure of our approach to counseling. These elements, though laid out in eight different main points should not be seen as a check-list. They are interwoven together to bring about a very effective approach to helping another person deal with living in this sin cursed world. We started with Involvement where the counselor builds a relationship with the counselee. He then would do the hard, but critical work of investigation-that is called gathering data. He must understand the person's story before he does out an answer (see Proverbs 18:13). Once he has sufficient data, he interprets the data and breaks down the information into the main issues that need to be addressed in the counseling process. Critical for all counseling is Inspiration-the giving of hope. We all need hope and so the Biblical Counselor must think through every unique situation and how he might be able to bring some level of biblical hope to the person. Another key element is the giving of Instruction, where by the counselor opens God's Word and brings God's answer to the counselee. As the counseling process begins, the counselor probably should get a commitment from the counselee to make certain commitments. We call this Inducement because the counselor is inducing the counselee to go God's way, to do the work needed to bring about true biblical change. Last time we looked at the biblical basis for Implementation and saw a couple of examples. The concept of Implementation is where the counselor helps the counselee begin to implement into his/her life, biblical principles that can bring about true change.

I want to add one more point to the element known as Implementation. When helping a person implement truth into their life, there are two basic things that must be dealt with in the process. One is what I call: "Roadblocks to Biblical Change" and the other is called "Change Promoters." The former one, Roadblocks, is a reference to those things in the person's life that may be holding them back from truly changing. For example, some people have wrong friends, or they work in an environment that provides temptation after temptation. Others frequent stores that are not conducive to having victory over a sin, while others read books or magazines or watch movies and/or television shows that aren't promoting righteousness in their lives. These are just a few examples of road blocks to biblical change that a person may have to deal with if they want to implement God's truth successfully. In light of these examples, let me just mention that I have seen people who want to change so badly that they deal with the roadblocks by doing things like: cutting off friendships, or quitting a job, or avoiding certain stores and gas stations, or not watching television, or avoiding movies unless their spouse is with them, etc. This is a form of radical amputation for them but these individuals want to

be right with God so these changes are really ones they are not resistant to. It is true, however, that at times a person may make the change, get rid of the road block, but then because of the battle with the flesh, find himself tempted to set the road block up again. In fact, is possible that the person might not only be tempted but actually might follow through with setting up the road block. Biblical counseling can help the person or exhort the person to tear the road block down.

Implementation involves not just getting rid of road blocks but in the positive sense, it also involves "change promoters". There are numerous change promoters one can implement into the counseling. They seem obvious to many Christians, but you might be surprised how often people never consider implementing these into their lives. As a counselor, you look at the data and then prescribe (there's that word that is in the Prescription family) specific change promoters. Here are some examples of change promoters: Accountability relationships-first an accountability with God and then with other believers. Accountability is only so effective, thus, one must have accountability with God first and then with individuals who are not afraid to ask hard questions. Another excellent change promoter is a small group. The person needs to be with hope-filled people so it is critical that he get plugged into a small group that will point him to Christ, will pray with and for him, will encourage him, and will admonish him if needed. Another change promoter is a discipline of reading Scripture. What we have found in counseling is that many people who come for counseling actually spend little to no time in the Bible. Seems simple, huh? The reality is that many Christians don't crack open their Bible during the week so a specific Bible reading plan can be an effective promoter of change. One can also promote change by having the person reading good, God-centered, Christ-exalting books. Another change promoter is serving in the church. Many people who are seeking counseling have not been serving others in their local church body. They need to begin to do so because part of the process of change includes learning to serve and give to others. This can be very instrumental in bringing about change in the person's life.

Implementation is where the rubber meets the road in biblical counseling. Because it is very specific application of biblical truths and principles to the person's life, it engineers great hope for the person. And as we all know, hope is absolutely essential for change to take place. But you as a biblical counselor have to think of specifics when it comes to implementing God's Word. You have to think creatively so as to apply specific truths of God's Word to specific issues in the person's life in specific ways. Good implementation does just that.

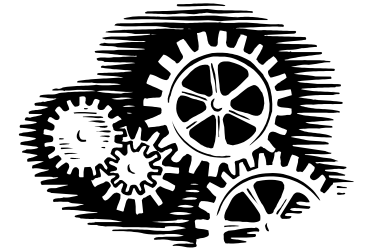
Next month we'll address the eighth and final key element of the counseling process.

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



SPECIAL THANKS: The Counseling Committee would like to thank all of the many people who volunteered to help with the Biblical Counseling conference. We were so blessed by how many people took part in serving and helping make this conference a success. So thank you!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

"...Be hospitable to one another without grumbling..." (1 Peter 4:9)

Can I brag a little? Nah, I'm not going to brag about me. I really have nothing about my life personally to brag about but I'd like to brag about my mother. Recently my mother had back surgery and spent a little bit of time in our wonderful Bozeman community. I'm not sure if it was her surgery or her respite in a local rest home that triggered a moment of reminiscing on my part but I found myself thinking one day as I left the hospital, "Lord, you have sure blessed me, my siblings, and many others with that wonderful woman." Proverbs 27:2 says, "Let another praise you and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips." You'd never hear my mom talk of her strengths, so allow me a moment to do so.

Those who know my mom would probably agree that, though sinful, she is really an incredible woman. Mom was an amazing farmer's wife. She worked hard to help my father keep a small farm running. She is an amazing cook, even if she did make me eat liver a time or two, and her cooking skills were useful for more than just feeding the faces of five growing kids. Mom worked hard and she loves Jesus Christ. She was/is always involved in some ministry, teaching the Bible, sharing the love of Christ, offering encouragement to children, teens, and adults. Mom has a great sense of humor as well. She takes the harassment and she can dish it out in return. But, having spent some time in my mom's hospital room, brought one aspect of my mom's life and character to the forefront of my mind. When I arrived at her hospital room, there were 15+ people in her room. I thought to myself as I entered the room, "Yep, this is just like mom. She even has a crowd visiting her in the hospital. I wonder if she has served them coffee?" You see, my mom has an amazing gift of hospitality. Growing up, it seemed like we had a revolving door at our home as person after person would come and go throughout the day. Coffee and tea was always served along with one of the many desserts that she had baked

in the preceding days. Every Sunday, or so it seemed, our house was bursting with people who came over for lunch following the Sunday morning church service. And each Sunday night we had a family ritual following Sunday night church to enjoy mom's awesome popcorn. And yes, usually sitting around the table was someone she and dad had invited to join us for our Sunday night popcorn dinner. Whenever a missionary family would visit our small country church, it was the norm to find the visiting family, sitting around our dinner table. Hospitality exuded from my mother's life.

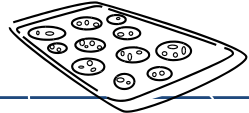
Why do I tell you this? Although I honor my mom with these words, I am mostly interested in promoting the concept of hospitality. As the verse at the top indicates, we are commanded to "...be hospitable to one another." Literally, the phrase be hospitable means "be a lover of strangers." Let that sink in a while. Love strangers? Seriously? I understand, loving those who love us in return or loving those who are good friends, but love strangers? Yes, that is the implication of the command. But Peter opens up the command, it seems, to include more than strangers because he uses the phrase, "one another." Could it be more than just a command to love strangers? The context and the example of Scripture seems to present the idea that hospitality toward others is a supernatural-natural outflow of a genuine love for Christ. It makes sense: If one is right with Christ, filled by the Spirit, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in his life, he will be others-centered and as a result will be hospitable to others, both strangers and friends alike. The example set forth throughout the book of Acts is that believers showed hospitality. In Acts you see a pattern of believers breaking bread together (probably both regular meals as well as the Lord's Supper). One can also see people hosting prayer meetings and times where groups of people came together to learn God's Word. One can also see that the Apostle Paul spent three years going from house to house while in Ephesus, teaching and admonishing believers. As one reads the book of Acts, it leaves us with a picture of the church being a group of people with incredible joy and with strong relationships resulting in a strong care and concern for one another and hospitality played a central role in this.

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But let's be honest. There is risk involved in being hospitable, especially to strangers. If I am hospitable to my friends, there really is no risk involved. We've already determined by virtue of the fact that we are friends that we can hang out and enjoy each other's company. But with a stranger, there is a risk. What if the stranger turns out to be someone who is just odd, or too quiet, or too loud, or too talkative, or has an odd laugh, or has a different world-view than me, or uses language that I would never use, or...you get the idea? Now all of a sudden, hospitality takes on a different flavor. A stranger just might rub me wrong and I might find myself grumbling about the very person I have shown hospitality to. That is why Peter says, "without grumbling." It's a caution within the command: "Be hospitable to one another..." but don't grumble.

I used to be amazed at my mom's ability to show hospitality. I remember as a kid watching her and dad open their door to person after person. Some of them were odd and brought to the table a unique dynamic. There were times I am sure that my parents probably thought, "Hmm, this is an interesting person or family." But I never heard them grumble. Oh, us kids, grumbled but I don't recall ever hearing my parents grumble about the persons whom they had hosted. That was life in the rural setting, exemplified by my parents. But how about us folks who live within the not-so-rural setting? I'm thinking that perhaps this command from the Spirit of our Lord might need to be pondered for a time. How are we as a church family really doing when it comes to being hospitable? How can we possibly become more open to growing to being more hospitable to strangers?

Are we welcoming to strangers? Do we open our homes and our lives to encourage and serve others—strangers and non-strangers alike? There are many practical ways to pull off this one simple command. It starts with realizing it is a command for each of us. It's not just a good idea, nor is it just a command given to the leadership of the church. I know our family could use some work in this area. Sure, our house seems to be teeming with teenagers at times but I'm wondering if perhaps we could use some more work in this area. How about you? By the grace of God, we as God's people can, in the days ahead, work hard to be hospitable to one another. In the meantime, I think I'll head to the farm to enjoy a cup of coffee and one my mom's awesome cinnamon



Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

Q: Could you respond to the accusation that Biblical counseling sees no purpose for and actually seems to oppose the use of resources such as "Love and Respect", "His Needs, Her Needs," Personality tests, etc.? Haven't these helped many people over the past decades?

A: Though this question was asked of me a year or two ago, it is an appropriate time to answer this since this very issue has been one that has been a topic of discussion recently. But let me say that it raises an issue that is so broad that I will take a couple of editions of the COG to address it.

First, remember that Biblical counselors hold to the fact that with Christ and His Word we have everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-5). In fact, it is through Christ's Word, the Bible alone, that one can be helped to see what is right, what is wrong, how to get right, and how to stay right, with the end result being that the person can be equipped for every good work (See 2 Timothy 3:15-17). In other words, God's Word is absolutely and totally sufficient. This last sentence is the crux of the matter. In fact, it is the dividing point between true biblical counseling and all other philosophies of counseling. When we say that the Bible is sufficient we are indeed saying that we need nothing—absolutely nothing—outside of Scripture to counsel. No personality test, no book written, no study done in the psychological labs are needed to enhance our counsel. So what do we do with or how do we respond to the idea that people seem to have been helped with some of the resources listed in the question? Maybe another question is: "If it doesn't contradict the Bible can we use it?"

I have stated in past editions that there are two different broad categories of psychology. Understanding the distinction between these two categories is critical for us as we examine the question put forward. Remember that there is Descriptive psychology and Prescriptive Psychology. Descriptive psychology is just that: "descriptive" and it is under the banner of descriptive psychology that things like personality tests would possibly fall. Descriptive psychology is simply using tests that have been taken by many individuals (often thousands) and the persons doing the study then develop a description of something based upon what they have observed. For example, descriptive psychology may be used to study the various personalities of humans. The study is developed and then a number of different personality categories are defined from those studies. So far, so good. Descriptive psychology is simply giving us categories or labels, if you will, that one can place on people.



Over the past half century or so, the labeling of persons with personalities has been very popular within the culture and the church jumped on board. In the 1970's, Tim LaHaye popularized within the church the temperaments (though he was not the first to write about them). His books, "Transformed Temperaments" and "I Love You But Why Are We So Different," were embraced by the church whole-sale. I remember the buzz as a kid and a teenager as people came to realize that they were either Sanguine, Melancholy, Choleric, or Phlegmatic, or a combination of any of these. Fascinating stuff for sure. Helpful? Not really. Later on, in the late 1980's and early 1990's, a whole new system of labeling developed and the four different personality types were given animal names: Otter, Golden Retriever, Lion, and Beaver. I kid you not. I was so grateful when someone said that they thought I was a Golden Retriever. They sure are loveable. Many in the church embraced this system, smiled, and thought, "Oh, this is so true. It describes me with exactness. The humor with it helped us to embrace it. But that fad began to fade and the world began to use the labels: Type A and Type B to label personalities. Recently in my research I came across other studies that present 16 personality types. For example, this study has 16 personality types listed, personalities such as, The Duty Fulfiler, The Mechanic, The Nurturer, The Artist, The Protector, The Idealist, The Scientist, etc. Guaranteed, if you read a description of each of these, you'll find yourself. Fascinating indeed. And these all developed from Descriptive Psychological studies.

One needs to understand the limitations however, of any personality test. Consider that the test was developed by sinful, finite humans. The computer had to be programmed by a sinful, finite human, and no personality test that I have read or heard about takes into consideration the effects of depravity on the humans involved in the personality study.

"So what is the problem?" one may wonder. On the surface there is really nothing wrong with studying the plethora of personalities and giving labels to each. The biblical counselor need not be intimidated by someone who is labeled, "Melancholy" or "Otter" or "Type A" or "The Protector". It's descriptive psychology and really, can be quite fascinating. But that is all it is: Descriptive and Fascinating. When it comes to the counseling room, it really has little to no value and frankly, to be honest, has at various points become a source of the problem and conducive to blame shifting.

Let me walk you through an example: imagine Jon and Jane Doe sitting in the counselor's office and Jane complains that Jon just "runs over the top of" her and other people. He owns a business

and he is very aggressive in his business dealings. In the process, he has climbed the corporate ladder and is successful in the eyes of many but in his wake lie literally dozens and dozens of people whom he has trampled over to get to where he is. In his 20 years as a business owner he has seen literally hundreds of people come and go, some working for him for less than a month. And Jane herself has been crushed and belittled and manipulated and treated like an employee more than a spouse. And Jon looks at the counselor and says, "Yeah, I am really aggressive. I admit it. You know, I'm Type A (or maybe he would say, "I'm Choleric") and she is or Type B (she might say, "I'm Phlegmatic" though not an exact comparison) and so it has been hard for both us. At times, I have been sure that we made a mistake in getting married." I wish this example were merely an example that is fabricated to make a point. The details of this case are but the excuse making and blame shifting isn't. It happens far too often. In this example, Jon was very accurate in his description. Sadly, he was woefully wrong when it came to his evaluation of the problem. You see, the problem with all of the personality labels is what our flesh likes to do with that information. It can be, and often is, an amazing way to blame-shift and offer excuses for sinful behavior. We haven't fallen far from Adam and Eve's stunt in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3). We look for subtle and not so subtle ways to place the blame on something other than self.

Personality tests and subsequent labels also come up short when giving an answer to the problems. As a biblical counselor, I simply find personality labels as fascinating and they can be helpful in gathering data about a person but the tests provide absolutely nothing for me to diagnose the real problems of the heart or the answer for the problems. For example, if a person says during the data gathering time, "I know I am a Type A personality," I have data. I can take that label (personality) and use it as jumping off point to begin to explore and gather data. What I then do with the data though is probably not going to be well-received by the person who just claimed "Type A personality" because for him, he sees it as an excuse, as a way of justifying conduct and thinking. For him, God made him with the personality he has, so as a biblical counselor my counsel will run contrary to it and confront him. This is a huge issue. It comes up often in the counseling room. So the question that perhaps needs to be answered is, "Is it really even wise to bring it into the church?" As a counselor, I don't see it as a good thing, not because of what a biblical counselor might do with the label but more so, what people in general do with it.

Next time I want to tackle the issue of the books referred to in the question.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY: (Confusion about Mental Illness article from The Berean Call)

Patients and parents concerned about mental illness have every right to be confused. The head of the federal agency that finances mental health research has just declared that the most important diagnostic manual for psychiatric diseases lacks scientific validity and needs to be bolstered by a new classification system based on biology, not just psychiatric opinion. The hitch is that such a biology-based system will not be available for a decade or more.

Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, posted his critique of the manual in a "Director's Blog" on April 29 and expanded on his reasoning in a recent interview with The New York Times. He was critiquing a forthcoming revision of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the first major reissue since 1994. Although there have been controversies over particular changes in diagnostic descriptions, he said, the new revision involves "mostly modest alterations" from its predecessor.

The psychiatric association's diagnoses are mostly based on a professional consensus about what clusters of symptoms are associated with a

disease, like depression, and not on any objective laboratory measure, like blood counts or other biological markers. The mental health institute says scientists have not produced the data needed to design a system based on biomarkers or cognitive measures. To fill the gap, the agency started a program two years ago to finance research in biology, genetics, neuroscience, cognitive science and other disciplines with the ultimate goal of helping scientists define disorders by their causes, rather than their symptoms.

The underlying problem is that research on mental disorders and treatment has stalled in the face of the incredible complexity of the brain. That is why major pharmaceutical companies have scaled back their programs to develop new psychiatric drugs; they cannot find new biological targets to shoot for....Meanwhile, the diagnostic manual remains the best tool to guide clinicians on how to diagnose disorders and treat patients. Consensus among mental health professionals will have to suffice until we can augment it with something better.

[Editorial Board, "Shortcomings of a Psychiatric Bible," New York Times Online, May 11, 2013]

[TBC: The more psychologists learn, the less they know, echoing Dr. Sigmund Koch's conclusions, "The hope of psychological science became indistinguishable from the fact of psychological science. The entire subsequent history of psychology can be seen as a ritualistic endeavor to emulate the forms of science in order to sustain the delusion that it already is a science" (The American Scholar, Autumn 1973, p. 66).

This simply notes what was known from the beginning, as another commentator states regarding the work of Freud: "The greatest criticism of the psychodynamic approach is that it is unscientific in its analysis of human behavior. Many of the concepts central to Freud's theories are subjective and as such impossible to scientifically test. For example, how is it possible to scientifically study concepts like the unconscious mind or the tripartite personality? In this respect the psychodynamic perspective is unfalsifiable as the theories cannot be empirically investigated" (McLeod, "Psychodynamic Approach," Simply Psychology, 2007.)

