

The Counseling Zone

By Pastor Blake Shaw



We are finally at the end of this series of articles on the key elements of the Biblical Counseling process. We have seen how the counselor must develop Involvement in the life of the person he counsels. He must Investigate—that is he must gather data so that he has a clear picture of what the real issues are in the life of the person who has arrived for counseling. The counselor must then do something with the data, and that is, he must Interpret the data and determine what issues must be addressed in the counseling process. All of us need hope. Thus, at the end of any counseling, the person has hopefully received inspiration (or hope). Once we define the issues to be addressed we open up God's Word and begin to Instruct from the Bible, bringing God's solution to man's problems. Instruction from God's Word is what will distinguish Biblical Counseling from every other counseling philosophy on the planet. But it is critical to also compel the counselee to go God's way. So we Induce him to submit to the Lord and do what God wants him to do. As the counseling process unfolds, we help the counselee Implement God's truth into his life. It is at this juncture where we have to help the counselee implement specific truths from God's Word into his heart and life. In doing so, we have to be alert to any potential roadblocks that the person may have in his life that may be impeding his growth. With such roadblocks, we may have to have the counselee cut these things entirely from his life as these may be the very things that will hold him back from change.

Let's look at our last key element. When do we know we are done meeting with someone who has come in for counseling? How can one tell when a person is ready to graduate from the counseling process? Those are very common questions. So our last key element is what we call, "Integration." Integration is basically a reference to when the person who came for counseling has now become integrated into the life of the church to where he is now functioning the way God desires him to function. When the person shows up for counseling it is fairly safe to say that he is not living the way God wants him to live. Often, not always, he is caught/trapped in a trespass. Some issue in life has a strangle hold on him and thus, he is not serving others and using his spiritual gifting to build up the body of Christ. So "integration" is what we are aiming for when we begin the counseling process.

The question is often asked, "How do you know when a person is ready to graduate?" There are several things we look for when we consider graduating a person from the counseling relationship. First, if they start to struggle with something, do they have all the

tools in place to know how to biblically diagnose the issues in their heart? Do they know how to biblically respond to temptation that comes their way and do they faithfully do this? Do they know what to do if they fall into temptation and sin? Do they know how to help another person? Do they have people seek them out for counsel? Are they faithfully serving others in their local church body? Do they faithfully practice the one another commands given throughout the Scriptures? Is the list of problems that they had when they first arrived now empty? Do others who know them give a good report that they are consistently doing well? Those are all critical elements to determining if a person has truly changed and is now ready to graduate. Until we can answer in the affirmative with these, the counseling process should continue.

It seems like I have the chance to write about things that grow out of my own failure as a biblical counselor, more than my successes, so I simply want to add one more point on this issue of integration. One thing I have learned over the years is how important it is to not graduate a person prematurely. It is very easy to do this. If you have met with a person for 10, 12, 14 or more weeks they are most likely pretty eager themselves to wrap up the weekly appointments and to move on with life. If a person has all of the above elements in place, it is time to graduate him, doing so in a slow process.

There is another side to this that I am all-too familiar with. I have had a handful of people return a year or two later after I had wrapped up the counseling, still struggling with the very same issue. Because of that, I realized that perhaps I had cut the person loose prematurely. Others I have counseled, actually left the church several years later and as I began to examine what had happened, it became clearer to me that they weren't totally integrated into the life of the church. They hadn't truly learned to serve and give to others. As soon as their problem was dealt with, they returned to living a self-focused life, never becoming one to give and serve others in the church family. At some point they exited the church family for "greener grass" elsewhere. So we simply have to be alert to this possibility and work hard to avoid graduating the person before he is fully integrated back into the church body.

Integrating the person back into the life of the church is a time of celebration. The counselee experiences great joy at this juncture because now they are functioning in life as a Christ-centered, God-glorifying servant of the Lord. Nothing in life is better than being in that position.

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, UNPLUGGED

COMMUNITY OF GRACE

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:14-15)

I hate weeds. I'm pretty convinced you do as well. I recall a discussion my father and I had when I was younger and growing up on a farm. He and I were traveling somewhere and we went by a huge field that was blanketed with what appeared to be beautiful yellow flowers. I said, "Dad that is a gorgeous field with all of those flowers in it." He responded by explaining to me that the flowers were actually noxious weeds that are destroying the crops and if they don't spray them and kill them those weeds will spread to neighboring farms and destroy their crops as well. The lesson on weeds continued for a few more minutes as dad talked about how tough some weeds can be to get rid of. Some of them "go to seed" and spread in staggering proportions. Other weeds have deep roots that are harder to deal with as well. That's the nature of weeds and they are not a joy to work with.

But, all botanical lessons aside, there is another weed, a spiritual weed, that has to be addressed. Only this weed has no beauty to it. It spreads. It destroys. Yet it has nothing to do with botany. It has everything to do with your heart and mine. Hebrews 12:15 speaks about a root of bitterness that springs up and causes trouble and by it many are defiled. Bitterness sounds like something that needs to be dealt with rather quickly, huh?



Robert Jones says, "There is nothing uglier than bitterness—that inner anger lodged in the heart, sometimes known only to the bitter person (and his all-seeing God). Bitterness is settled anger, the kind that not merely reacts to someone's offense, but forms a more general and global

animosity against the offender himself. Anger responds to an incident: 'I'm angry about what you did.' Bitterness goes deeper to form an attitude—a settled stance or posture—against the perpetrator: 'I'm bitter at you because you are an evil person.' The incident becomes almost secondary."

So, I want to write about this issue and do so rather frankly because, not only have I seen it in my own heart throughout my life, but in recent years, I have seen people destroyed by it. Bitterness is a tough spiritual weed to deal with. No doubt you have seen a bitter person. Or perhaps you have battled bitterness in your own life. Or, even more so, perhaps you are battling it right now. You see, I don't think any of us are immune to this so I want to write with some urgency here because over the past two years I have seen marriages decimated by bitterness. I have observed bitterness eroding the lives of people, bringing separation between married couples who once were deeply in love. I have seen it bring separation between parents and children, between siblings, between neighbors, between co-workers, between teachers, between coaches, between players, and between best of friends, and have actually seen bitterness get such a grip on people's lives that it drives them to the brink of despair. Worse still, bitterness will destroy a person's relationship with Christ. Bitterness is like a cancerous tumor that if not surgically dealt with can prove itself to be deadly. It could be likened to a deadly plague as well, a plague that sweeps through a nation and decimates a population. In other words: Bitterness has to be dealt with. It has to be dealt with expeditiously or it can wreak havoc on a family, a ministry, a church. You see, bitterness doesn't just effect the one who is bitter. It defiles others. That's the nature of bitterness. It slowly begins to ooze out in the person's conversations. It hits the gossip train and begins to pull other people along with it's sickening course. Before long, person after person find themselves ensnared. Yet, the oddity of bitterness is that it usually hurts the bitter person more than anyone else. It's like drinking poison, hoping that the one who is your enemy will be the one who dies.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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It's no wonder that the Holy Spirit through the pen of the Apostle Paul says, **"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice"** (Ephesians 4:31). It's no wonder that Paul tells husbands to **"love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."** These are commands so it tells me that these are issues of concern for God and that bitterness is a normal human reaction when one is wronged. Yet, there is something unique about bitterness. My observation of it is that it can be very subtle. Sometimes it can be tucked in behind something as simple as a prayer request. You know how it goes: The person shares a prayer request for their spouse giving just enough details to allow the other person to sound like they are a mess, while the purveyor of such information appears to be caring and concerned. Yet all the while, behind the prayer request is the subtle bitterness that drives the actual prayer request.

Subtle or not, my friends, let's deal with bitterness in an aggressive manner. Some might say, "Yes, I do struggle with bitterness, so how do I deal with it?" I realize that there are some very hard situations that people are in or have gone through. Life is hard and I won't pretend to be able to relate to some of the things people have gone through in some situations. So as we approach this issue of dealing with bitterness, I have say that I ache for you if you are in a brutal situation of abuse, of false accusations, or whatever the circumstances might be. Let me set the stage here and then next month, Lord willing, I can develop this more.

First, we have to start with admitting that we are bitter. This is a huge hurdle for some people to get over. Like other sins, such as pride, self-righteousness, etc., bitterness for some can be hard to see in their own life. But bitterness is seen when one looks at his speech. Jesus said that from **"...the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"** (Luke 6:45), thus, when one listens to his own speech, he can often detect a heart of bitterness. Bitterness can be expressed in many

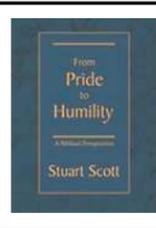
ways. For example, a pastor friend of mine in another state worked with a woman who was so bitter towards her husband that she expressed her bitterness through snide and cutting remarks about him to her parents, her friends at church, and her neighbors. Eventually the bitterness grew to where she despaired of life as a married woman. She knew she couldn't divorce because, you know, God hates divorce. Never mind the thought that God actually hates a lot of other sins (see Proverbs 6:16-19). So in her bitterness she is staying with her husband but bitterness has such a grip on her life that she actually begs God to take her life rather than admit that her heart problem is bitterness. Bitterness has an odd way of expressing itself. Others have expressed their bitterness through gossip, or through things such as: manipulation, through sarcasm, avoidance, violence, and avoidance. Others still simply express their bitterness through silence. But bitterness is most often expressed in the words that are said and the tone in which they are stated.

So the process of dealing with bitterness must begin the same as it does for any change to happen with any other issue: Admitting that one has a problem with bitterness. For you, maybe over the next few weeks it would be good to consider your life and see if perhaps there is an issue with bitterness. Look at your speech, the words you use and how you use them. If you are humble and bold, maybe even ask the most honest friend you have, **"Do you see any bitterness in my life?"** Be prepared for the answer.

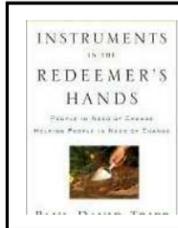
Next month, let's consider some more ways that we can handle this nasty problem of the heart.



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.



From Pride to Humility, by Stuart Scott — This resource is phenomenal, to say the least. In a short, concise booklet format, Stuart Scott defines pride and then gives a breakdown of all of the various ways pride shows up in our lives in subtle, and not so subtle, ways. He then explains humility and writes about the qualities of humility and challenges the reader to put off pride and put on humility in very specific ways.



"Instruments In the Redeemer's Hands," by Paul Tripp — This very helpful book is written in an easy to read style that will help the reader understand the joys, the challenges, the reality of, and the process of counseling. It's a great book for you to start off with if you want to figure out how to practice nouthetic ministry.

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. As I said last month, this is such a broad topic that it needs more than one edition of the COG to address it. Last month I addressed the issue of personality types and tests and challenged the reader to ask the question: *"Since using personality types and labels is actually conducive for blame shifting, do we really want to even use these things in the counseling room?"* My point was that even if one could argue that personality types/tests are not an issue of sin, nor contrary to God's Word, why bring them into counseling if the tendency is for people to use their personality type as an excuse for their sinful behavior.

Let's address the second aspect of this question. The original question asker was concerned about statements I had made related to two books that are very popular among professing Christians. The first one, **"Love and Respect" (L&R** from now on) happened to be at the top of the Christian best seller list for many months. It was widely embraced by evangelical Christians, liberal Christians, Mormons, Catholics, etc. Why the popularity? And why is Blake so concerned?

First of all, let me state up front the problems with the book and why I have never found any reason to recommend it. Foundations matter, don't they? Ask anyone in construction and they will tell you that with the foundation of any structure that it is absolutely essential to have a solid, secure foundation. Jesus Himself spoke to the issue of the foundation when he spoke of the wise and the foolish man who built two houses, one on a foundation of rock, the other on a foundation of sand. So it is no secret that the stability of the foundation to any structure is critical. And that is the problem with **"L&R"**. You see, **"L&R"** is built off a foundation of bad Bible interpretation and godless psychology. Let me explain first how it is based off of bad Bible interpretation.

First, the Scriptural basis for the book is Ephesians 5:33 which says, **"Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."** From that verse comes the title of the book. That verse becomes the leaping off point to try to build the thesis of the book with the idea being that since husbands are commanded to love their wives and wives are commanded to respect their husbands then it follows that wives need love and husbands need respect. But that isn't in the biblical text at all. It's

nowhere in Scripture. In fact, I think the real need is this: A husband has a need and that **need** is that he needs to love his wife. A wife has a need and that need is that she **needs** to respect her husband. Emerson Eggerich simply turns and twists the verse to make it say something that it isn't really saying. So the natural question that is often asked is, "But Blake, wouldn't you agree that love and respect are critical aspects of the marriage relationship?" And my response is, "Yes. Absolutely. In fact, if a man wants to have a great marriage, he **NEEDS** to love his wife like Christ loved the church, and a wife, if she wants to have a great marriage, she **NEEDS** to respect her husband. If both husband and wife are doing what they need to do, that couple will have a great marriage."

Actually though the use of the verse was not the foundational element to the book. The foundational element to the book is totally built off of the idea of "needs." This is likewise the problem with the book, **"His Needs, Her Needs."** Even the sub-title of **"L&R"** is juiced with the psychology of needs when it speaks of the "respect he desperately **needs**." The issue of "needs" is absolutely critical for our discussion here, and really, any discussion related to problems with psychology. It was godless men, with the last name Maslow and Adler, who developed a full-blown philosophy of "needs". Such philosophy makes sense if you start your belief system from an evolutionary foundation and corresponding rebellion against God. And schools of psychological training embraced much of what was promoted by Maslow and Adler. The church, in typical fashion, followed suit and embraced the needs based philosophy as if it were the church's long-lost favorite relative. Needs based philosophy resonated with people in the church because it presented the idea that your problems are because your "needs" are not being met. It only makes sense then that if a person has certain needs, say, in the marriage, and the spouse isn't meeting those needs, then the spouse needs to change and start meeting those needs.

Dr. Harley, in **"His Needs, Her Needs"** says, "The right needs are so strong that when they're not met in marriage, people are tempted to go outside marriage to satisfy them...When these needs are unmet that is unfair to the spouse who must go through life without ethical alternatives."

Do we really understand the implications of such a statement? This tosses us right back into the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were questioned by God and their defense was merely to point the finger at someone else. This is why the **"L&R"** philosophy and the **"His Needs, Her Needs"** philosophy is so deadly. Think this through. If I have a supposed "need" in my marriage for recreational companionship and my wife doesn't meet that need, it leaves an open door to justifying me having some other woman in my life who can meet that supposed need. If my wife "needs" financial support but I can't or even won't get a job, then that leaves an open door for her to go

find a guy who can meet this supposed need. We cannot balk at such an idea because this happens all the time. It is no laughing matter. I have had men, red faced in anger exclaiming things such as, "She knows I need sexual fulfillment and she hasn't had sex with me for weeks. Of course I'm going to look at pornography and sleep with other women. She refuses to meet my **needs**." Or the woman who sought to justify her pursuit of a separation on the grounds that her husband did not have a solid commitment to the family and would not talk much and those are her "needs" that are not being met.

To be fair, the "needs based philosophy makes sense on the surface, but therein is the problem. Such a philosophy is not found any where in the pages of Scripture. In fact, Scripture seems to be saying something radically different. It is true that needs are talked about in Scripture. In Matthew 6, Jesus specifically addressed our needs when he spoke of anxiety and he tells us in that passage that our needs are food, drink, and covering. That would have been a perfect place for Jesus to add to the list supposed needs that we have. In fact, if you look at **"His Needs, Her Needs"**, you learn that a man's needs are 1) Sexual Fulfillment; 2) Recreational Companionship; 3) Attractive Spouse; 4) Domestic Support; and 5) Admiration. You also learn that a woman needs 1) Affection; 2) Conversation; 3) Honesty Openness; 4) Financial Support; and 5) Family Commitment. Certainly somewhere in the pages of Scripture we should be able to find these needs listed, shouldn't we? Yet instead, the Bible is silent on these. You see, this issue of needs is the foundation upon which **"L&R"** and **"His Needs, Her Needs"** are both built. It is dangerous and unbiblical to bring it into the church.

Now, one might say, "Come on Blake, we read that book and it was really helpful to us in our marriage," so let me add a couple of closing thoughts. I would actually say that if you went to the middle of Love and Respect and read the last half of the book, you would be able to come up with many practical things you can do, husbands, to show love to your wives, and wives, to show respect to your husbands. In the last half of the book you have some very practical and helpful suggestions. But understand that the book is built off of an unbiblical foundation. In fact, there might be a helpful exercise to do if you are reading the book, "Love and Respect." Use a pen and every time you come to the word "need/needs" cross it out and write in above it the word, "desire" or "cravings" or "lusts." That is what is being talked about when the word "need" is used.

The concerns I have about these two books, among others, is not simply small details in the book. The concerns grow out of what seems to be the heavy dose of psychology that is used and passed off as truth. But when such information runs contrary to Scripture it is only right that we speak. Now, do I dare say it: **"I need** to wrap up this article."

