

The Counseling Zone

By Pastor Blake Shaw



Over a number of months now 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." Once we establish a working relationship, we begin the in-depth, sometimes arduous (difficult/tiring) process of gathering data. This is hard work and can consume a lot of time. But we do this because we want to truly understand the person's life story before we begin to try to provide God's answer for their problem. (Proverbs 18:13). We move from gathering data to interpreting the data in order to determine what the real issues are for which the person needs counseling. A critical cog in the counseling wheel is providing hope (Inspiration) for the person. As was noted in previous editions, people need hope. You and I need hope. In fact, many of us would probably not get out of bed if we didn't have some kind of "hope". For counseling, we want to provide true, biblical hope for the person who seeks counsel. It is possible to provide a type of hope that is not really biblical, so we need to make sure that we are helping the person understand what God says about their situation and that He is the One who can bring order out of the chaos of life.

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 time we concluded the element of biblical counseling known as "Inducement." This element is simply where we seek to induce, or compel, the counselee to make certain commitments that are critical for true change to take place. In several of my counseling situations where I personally have seen the counseling fail, it was because I failed to induce or compel the person or persons to make the commitments necessary to bring about life change. I made assumptions that since he/she showed up for counseling with me, a Biblical counselor, that he/she must have a desire to change. Not so. In fact, the truth is that many people who show up for counseling have their own agenda and often times it doesn't exactly align with God's agenda for their life, so as a counselor, I have to compel them to embrace God's agenda.

We would come up short if that is where we stop in the biblical counseling process, so let me mention a seventh element: Implementation. To implement something means to put it into effect. In biblical counseling, we identify the problem, then we open up God's Word to find the answer to the problem, then we begin the process of specifically implementing God's truth into every day life. This element is so critical to the counseling process.

One passage, among numerous ones, address this issue of implementation. Romans 13:14 says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lust." Here Paul uses the phrase "put on", used in various places in Scripture, and this two word phrase helps us understand part of what is needed in order for the person to change.

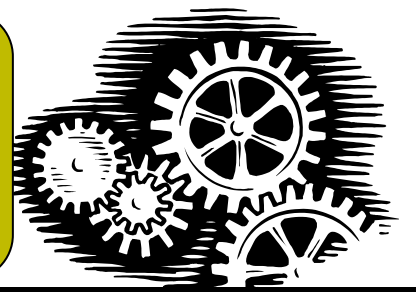
In another passage, Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul speaks about putting off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new man. From passages like these two we come to understand that if change is going to truly take place, the person seeking to change must, by faith, put off certain ways of thinking and doing, then be renewed in the mind, and finally responding to the put offs by implementing specific put ons of certain ways of thinking, doing, and responding. This is the general process of implementation.

One of the many awesome things about God's Word is that God didn't leave this implementation process in generalities. He gives us very specific examples of what a person is to do. For example in Ephesians 4:28, Paul wrote, "Let him who stole, steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good that he may have something to give him who has need." Here is a basic put off-put on implementation process. If we are dealing with a person who has a problem with stealing, we can certainly tell such a person that he needs to stop stealing. That is clear from Scripture that such activity is opposed to God's very specific commands. But we dare not simply stop with a command of "put off stealing" or "stop stealing." We have to work with the person at the heart level and then replace stealing with what is right. So we consider the person who steals and we know that one of the things that is critical to know about him is that he is selfish and only thinks about himself, as opposed to thinking about the person whom he is stealing from. So we exhort/admonish him to become others-centered. And the way he can become others-centered is by working with his own hands and giving to those who have need.

Implementation is related to the specific application of biblical commands and principles. Notice I used the word "specific." We Christians like to stay in generalities. We like to live in, what my friend Steve Viars calls, "Fuzzyland." But change doesn't happen in Fuzzyland. Change happens when we get specific in identifying what needs to change and what things need to be implemented in our life to bring about the change. For implementation to be truly effective one has to get specific. For example, in counseling a married man I might have him read and we might discuss Ephesians 5:25 looking at how Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. I might (and often do) counsel a husband who knows the command but has never given thought to how he might actually love His wife. So implementation could possibly include an assignment such as, "This week I want you, husband, to come up with a list of 50 ways that you can demonstrate and show love for your wife." The next week he begins to practice 5-10 of those 50 ways. What this is doing is moving it away from the general command of, "love your wife" to specific ways in which he might actually begin to obey the command.

There is one other part to the implementation process that I will expound on next month. For now, perhaps ask yourself, "When I think of changing in some area of my own life, do I get specific to the sin that needs to change and when I do, do I then change how I think about that sin in relation to God, and then do I develop specific things I can think and do in place of the sin that I am trying to get rid of in my life?" It's a good exercise for all of us.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

(Last month, Tana Devine began a set of articles on "Pray for One Another." Due to the fact that her husband has recently gone home to be with the Lord, we have a detour from the Pray for One Another theme until later. We do practice the praying for one another command now as we pray for Tana and the Devine family during this time. This month we consider the theme: "Submit to One Another.")

"...submitting to one another in the fear of God..." (Ephesians 5:21)

Words can be very powerful. You know it. I know it. In fact, let's run a test. As you read the following words, think of the thoughts or emotions that a simple word or two can stir up in you. Are you ready? Read through these slowly: Sleep; Chocolate; Vacation; Mondays; Abuse; Freedom; Politician; Divorce; Church; Alcohol; School; Ice Cream; Shopping; Hiking; Dating; Hawaii; Terrorist; Sirloin Steak. What thoughts or emotions came up when you read each of those words? I'm guessing that some of them brought a smile. Others may have brought about a frown or even provoked a tear for some. Sometimes powerful emotions or even regrets can be prompted by one word. That is the power of words. How one responds to a word can actually hinge upon some life experience. For example, ask any group of singles what comes to mind when they hear the word, "dating" and you'll get all sorts of reactions. Some smile, others frown. Some shake their head and will speak of dating as something they once longed for while others will confess that they have an interest in dating but are fearful of it at the same time. And if you ask a student who is pursuing a degree in geology, you might get a whole different reaction to the word "dating." You get the point. Words matter. Words are powerful. Words provoke a plethora of responses.

Let me mention one more word and then let's ponder the word itself and your own reaction to it. The word I'd like us to ponder is the word, "submit." Now there's a word that stirs up all sorts of reactions. It's really not a dirty word. In fact, how you view the concept of submission can be a very clear indicator of the health of your Christian walk, of how you are doing in your job, your marriage, your reputation in a school or community. The simple word "submit" has fallen on hard times in recent decades. What is it about this word "submit" that gets such strong reactions? Why do we have such a problem with it? In case you doubt whether this simple word is a problem with people, let me pass to you various quotes that come from the counseling room to illustrate: "Oh great. You have to bring up that word!" "Yeah, I know. Submit! Submit! Submit!" "That's the problem with Biblical Counseling. You guys always talk about submission." "I don't mind submitting to some in leadership but I'll decide who to submit to and who not to submit to." "Can we, for once, get marriage counseling without talking about submission." "How in the world am I suppose to stay in a marriage where the woman refuses to submit? You're asking me to love her when she won't submit?" "Yeah, my husband is always telling me to submit."

One simple word yet such strong reactions. What a tragedy. Think about the concept of "submission." It is a word that is absolutely critical for the orderly functioning of a society. Without it, anarchy reigns. The concept of submission is absolutely critical for an effective military. Imagine a military with no authority structure and no submission. What about in schools? If you find a school with poor leadership, you'll probably find a school with a lack of submission to said leadership. And chaos reigns. What about in the home? Set the husband-wife relationship aside and focus on the role of submission in a parent-child relationship.

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We've all seen it: a child who rules the house, or the shopping cart, or the day of playing in the park. Or the teenager with rage filling her eyes provoked by an abusive dad (or parents). Not a pretty sight, huh? How about in the church? I have friends who have been pastors in churches that are made up of people who do not like to submit to leadership. Some of those churches are run by a wealthy family, a strong-personality woman who has a lifetime of experience of getting her own way, or a family who was involved in the starting of the church. The unwritten rules of church-life in such churches are, those individuals or families call the shots. And such churches have seen many pastors come and go, never clueing into the possibility that the problem is a lack of submission to the leadership. Each of those pastor friends came out of their pastoral experience in these churches, still alive, but worked-over to such a degree that some never returned to full-time ministry.

Let's be honest: Submission is a hard thing to learn. It is a hard thing to practice. It's not something you or I do naturally. As a little kid, our sin nature battled against the idea of submission to authority. As teenagers, most of us took every opportunity to push against authority structure. Many of us looked forward to leaving home and being free from the oppressive oversight of our parents. But one thing we could never get away from is an authority structure. Whether we went to college or went into the work place, we found ourselves still surrounded by some form of authority to which we had to submit. As aging adults, we still have to practice submission on many different levels. So we have to be told throughout Scripture to "submit to" authority. It

is commanded which tells us that it doesn't come naturally. We are to submit to authority but, uniquely enough, we are, in actuality, also suppose to submit to one another. Let's consider this concept.

When it comes to submission to one another, there are several critical things to consider. First, we are told in Ephesians 5:21 that we are to be submitting to one another but it is not a command in this passage. Actually, the structure of the passage is such that the command is back in verse 18 which tells us to not be drunk with wine but to be filled with (by) the Spirit. That is the imperative/command. So when we get to verse 21, we understand that the supernatural-natural outflow of being filled by the Spirit of God is that we submit to one another. In the flow of the passage, what Paul delineates are some examples of submission that flow from being filled by the Spirit. He talks about wives submitting to husbands as to the Lord. Less, one be inclined to be resistant to the idea, Paul continues to illustrate what submitting to one another looks like and tells husbands to submit to their wives by actually being willing to die for them, to nourish them, to cherish them.

Paul continues to illustrate this mutual submission in chapter six when he tells children that they are to obey and honor their parents. And he tells parents (more specifically fathers) to not provoke their children to wrath.

The counseling implications of this section of Scripture are profound. Take for example, marriage and family issues. A husband can often be guilty of using the command, "Wives, submit to your husbands," as a club to manipulate his wife to submit. Likewise, a wife can be repulsed by or resistant to the

concept of submitting to her husband. Take the husband in this scenario as he uses

the command to wives to submit to their husbands as a manipulative tool. Has he really thought through the implications of the passage? If he truly wants his wife to submit, to be consistent, we would see him literally lay down his life for his wife. We would see him nourish her and cherish her. At the same time, we might find a wife who pushes against the concept of submitting to her husband, but simultaneously she wants a husband who gives up everything for her, who cherishes her, and lavishes her with love. The real problem in these situations is not submission. The greater problem is really that of the heart and whether one is truly filled by the Spirit of God with the mind of Christ. You see, any time a husband and wife sit in the counseling office and are at odds with one another, or parents drag their kid into the counseling office hoping that somehow the counselor can pull off a miracle, the main problem is that there is a violation of the command of Ephesians 5:18.

Submission is really not a bad word. It was beautifully exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ Himself who, in humility, submitted His life to the will of the Father. In doing so, He forever alters how we understand submission and effects how we too, are to live a life of submitting to one another. I know, submission has never been a popular thing in the world system. But neither has Jesus. As we practice the one another commands of the New Testament, let's work hard at submitting, first to the Lord, then to one another.



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.



Question: Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

Why are Biblical Counselors so opposed to labels that are given to people in the secular counseling world?

Answer: This question fits nicely with our lead article in relation to the power of words. Words are powerful. Labels are powerful. So we better understand a little more about the concern. To say that biblical counselors are opposed to labels is really too broad of a generality. I know of no biblical counselor who is opposed to labels being given to people who are struggling with problems in this life. I do know that our main concern is this: if labels are given they ought to be accurate labels.

Giving labels is really inevitable. Labeling things goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam labeled animals. In fact, God puts labels on us: saints, beloved, over-comers, victors, etc., while labeling those who don't know Christ as unbelievers. In I Corinthians 6:9-10 God gives a list of labels using words such as, "drunkards, homosexuals, gossips, slothful, etc." So we don't want to discard labels altogether. We simply want to give labels that are accurate, appropriate, and labels that help.

Think with me for a moment about how an accurate label can truly help a person deal with the real issues. One person I met with years ago was struggling with anxiety and sleep issues. There were a lot of pressures in his life between family and business. Had he gone to a doctor there is a chance he would have been labeled as having an Anxiety Disorder. That label would not have helped him. He would have begun a regimen of drugs to deal with the anxiety and the drugs possibly would have helped him feel less anxious. What was actually happening was the man was living in the fear of man. He was deeply enslaved to others, mostly in relation to his finances, since he had borrowed a lot of money from a family member so that he could start his business. Others in his family had also been incredibly successful with their businesses so there was this constant, unwritten pressure that he too had to succeed. This guy didn't have an Anxiety Disorder. He had an extreme battle with living in the fear of man. When we gave him the accurate label, he found hope and began the process of change.

Jay Adams writes, "The difficulty with labeling isn't that diagnosticians call names. The trouble comes 1) when they carelessly gum the wrong label on someone's file, 2) when they don't warn about the fact that labels often refer to temporary, changeable states of being,

and 3) when they substitute labeling for genuine help as though a label were an end in and of itself rather than a means to an end. Labels identify, direct, classify, and enable us to understand and communicate."

When it comes to labeling we simply have to be alert to some of the influences that incorrect labeling can cause in the lives of those whom we counsel. Here are several things we have to be alert to in labeling: 1) There is a danger that some people who have been labeled inaccurately will actually try to live up to that labeling. You might have a person who is looking for an excuse to not have to work or a means to justify his sinful behavior. I've seen this with individuals who have embraced the label, "OCD" (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). No medical test proves that there is an actual organic issue causing OCD, but I have seen people use this diagnosis as a way to not work or an excuse to not even look for work. That is one danger of labeling inaccurately.

2) There is a danger with labels because a label can give a false sense of permanence. For example, take the word, "alcoholic." It has been accepted in our world system as a disease. Research it. You might be surprised to learn that there is no proof whatsoever that it is a disease. Yes, there is a physiological factor, but no, it is not a disease. A person will say, "Well once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic." There is no hope whatsoever in that labeling. Instead, we can use a biblical label in relation to this and label the person, a "drunkard" (I Corinthians 6:9-10). There is great hope with that label because Paul tells us that some of the Corinthian believers were (past tense) drunkards at one time, but according to verse 11, that ended. Labels can communicate permanence and that is not really accurate.

3) Sometimes a label can be a covering for laziness or ignorance. It is my observation that the church today has an ignorance about the effects of sin on mankind. We have perhaps lost the skill of observation, of deep thought about habits and responses and the true condition of the inner person. So we provide labels on people because the label makes sense. But it might actually be a label flowing out of ignorance. Even more problematic though is when a label is given or accepted because of laziness. Which is harder: To accept a label given by the psychiatric community or to spend hours upon hours gathering data, hearing the person's story, and digging into God's Word to see what God's answer might be for the person's problem. That question doesn't even really need to be asked. If Jane Doe brings in her 11 year old son and says,

"He has ADD or ADHD," it is indeed easier to encourage her to make sure he takes his doctor prescribed Ritalin than it is to spend hours seeking to understand both the kid's story and the family structure. Frankly, I believe that many Christians don't want to get involved in counseling because it takes time, energy, and work. Because of that, we can turn to labels because we don't want to do the work. There is also an issue of laziness for the person who has been labeled. Which is easier: Take a medication that suppresses a lack of attention or a mood, or work hard to understand God's answer to the problem and faithfully apply God's truth to one's life to bring about true change? A label can indeed provide the counselee a easy escape simply to be lazy.

4) A label can sometimes have an umbrella effect. What I mean is that some labels can be so broad that many other things fall under the initial label. For example, if we have someone labeled "Schizophrenic" we have someone who has bizarre behavior. The problem is that bizarre behavior can be caused by organic or inorganic causes. To use the label "schizophrenia" to cover both organic and inorganic causes does not help because one word can't cover problems that are caused by sleep loss, or hallucinogenic drugs or brain tumors or chemical imbalances of various sorts, or camouflaging or fear or long term habits of escapism, etc. Such a label can be confusing and not helpful. If a person accepts the label "schizophrenia" it can lock such a person into treatment that doesn't really get to the heart of the issue.

On my desk is the new edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5 (also listed as DSM-5). It is a 945 page tome, used by the psychiatric world as their bible, so to speak. Page after page provides for the psychiatrist, psychologist, psychotherapist, and counselor, labels, descriptions of symptoms, and suggested treatments for the 100's of psychiatric diagnoses that are possible. What is fascinating to me in casually reading the DSM-5 is that many of the diagnoses, when listing the symptoms of the various disorders, actually simply list behaviors that are symptomatic in one so labeled. As a biblical counselor, I don't need to cower in the face of some label. I can note the label given, but then get busy seeking to understand what is going on in the life of the person (in their thinking, behavior, responding, worship, etc.) and rather than point them to a specialist in the world, can point them to the Great Physician and His truth.

