

The Counseling Zone By Pastor Blake Shaw



Now that we are done with the key elements of the Biblical Counseling process, we are going to take a case study followed with a few questions for you to ponder and wrestle with.

Case Study #2: Fifteen year old Ginny is aware that she is not well liked because (as she says) she is “so quiet,” she reports. “I want to have friends but it seems that they don’t want be my friend. I guess I’m just kind of shy and independent. For one thing, I don’t like all those stupid activities that other kids in the youth group get excited about. As far as I’m concern, the church youth meetings and events are immature!”

“What have you done to make friends, Ginny,” you inquire.

“Well, I try to make friends by going to meetings and so on, but I can’t seem to get interested in what interests the others.”

1. What must you tell Ginny?
2. Suppose that she is right about the youth group; how can she handle the problem differently?
3. Is Ginny shy? What does “shyness” often seem to indicate?



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A number of years ago, I met with a woman who shared with me about the verbal abuse she had been experiencing at home. She explained how in recent months her husband had become so mean. He belittled her, yelled at her, at times totally ignoring her, and she was now considering leaving him. My heart was so heavy and internally I grieved for this woman. I found myself stunned at the story that she shared that day, given that these were friends of mine who were in this situation. These were fellow-church goers. In that meeting I told the woman how sorry I was for all that she was going through, working to sympathize with her, acknowledging at the same time that what her husband was doing was so very wrong (and it was). I tried to give her hope, encouraging her to not leave him but to work hard at being a “I Peter 3:1-6 type of wife.” I assured her that I would prayerfully go to her husband and confront the sinful conduct. And I did. In fact, within 48 hours I was meeting with him and I went into the confrontation with guns-a-blazing. After I nervously carried on with my ten-minute diatribe about his conduct he interrupted me and asked, “Blake, I know that I have said some hurtful things. I’ve yelled at her. I’ve ignored her. But Blake, I just want to know how you would respond if you knew that your wife was having sex with other men?” He went on to tell me about her unfaithfulness—and she had even admitted to him that she was unfaithful. “She actually flaunts it,” he explained. “She’ll tell me about her adultery after the fact.” Her adultery was a present-tense reality, not a one-time mistake in the distant past. It is interesting how that tidbit of information hadn’t come out in her discussion with me.

So let me ask you: “What would you do at this point? We have two people—both of whom are in the wrong. One is committing adultery and the other is verbally abusive.” This illustrates the dilemma we find ourselves in when it comes to some abuse cases. The point I want you to see is that not all abuse cases are always really clean-cut in the details. So when someone says that we as a ministry are soft on abuse,

that usually grows out of an ignorance about abuse (usually they’ve heard one side) or about the abuse cases that we have had to deal with in our counseling. I wish we could say that we have dealt with each of these situations with absolute perfection but we can’t. Nor can anyone else on the planet claim that they have dealt with abuse in a perfect fashion. We try to be consistent but fail often. We know the nature of mankind is to abuse, to cover up, to manipulate, to have blind spots, to be skewed in perspective about what has happened. We know that we are to be patient with all men and gracious, yet firm. We also know that it takes two to tango, yet not all abuse cases are a result of the abused doing something wrong. For example, little children being abused by a drunken parent or a perverted person have normally done nothing to provoke the abuse. A wife, being abused by a drunken spouse has often done nothing to provoke the verbal or physical abuse that often accompanies intoxication. But, because we are not there when the abuse takes place, we have absolutely no way to verify if any provocation was involved in the incident. So we would say, “The abuse is just wrong, wrong, wrong, and it needs to stop.” In many cases we know our counsel and admonishment would fall on deaf ears. How do you address the issue if the other party is not innocent in the matter? We can’t allow the abuse to go on yet we also have to address the conduct in the life of the abused without discouraging them, blaming them, etc. That makes handling abuse situations brutally hard.

I realize that this answer doesn’t suffice for most people who struggle with how we (or the church at large) deals with abuse so I want to take the next several COG’s to answer the question of how a person can deal with abuse. We’ll have Pam Gannon weigh in on this as well.



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

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT



BY PASTOR BLAKE SHAW

Quiz Time: For a couple of months we have been focusing on the issue of bitterness. The ugly sin of bitterness rears its ugly head repeatedly in the counseling room so we know it is one issue that we must deal with often. So let’s begin this article with a short quiz to help you determine if perhaps bitterness is an issue in your life.

THE BITTERNESS QUIZ

1. Do you have difficulty resolving a conflict with a person?
2. Do you carry out acts of vengeance (verbal or physical) against a person?
3. Do you withdraw from certain people?
4. Do you have outbursts of anger towards someone?
5. Do you make biting sarcastic remarks to a person?
6. Do you speak condescendingly to a person?
7. Are you overly critical of a particular person?
8. Do you view a person (or a gender) with suspicion and distrust?
9. Do you have an intolerance for a person?
10. Are you hypersensitive?
11. Do you find yourself impatient with a particular person?
12. Do you show disrespect for a particular person?
13. Are you rebellious against a specific person who is an authority figure?
14. Do you misuse some level of authority that you have been granted?
15. Do you struggle with depression? (***)
16. Do you have doubts of whether you are saved?
17. Can you remember with amazing specificity the details of when you were wronged?

***Not all depression is caused by bitterness but sometimes it is.

How’d you do? If you said, “Yes” to a few of these, it might be time for you to pause and consider that bitterness has worked its way into your heart.

So what do we do with bitterness? How do we deal with it? As I mentioned in a previous edition, Being bitter about someone is like drinking poison then waiting for the other person to die. It is madness, huh?

Call to mind that bitterness is spoken of in the pages of Scripture. There are verses that speak directly to the topic and there are examples of people who had a bitterness problem. If you studied the word in Scripture you would find out that the word actually describes the bitter taste of certain food and drinks. The verb “to be bitter” actually means “to cut.” Bitterness is, indeed, an internal problem, inflicting as much damage on the one who is bitter, yet bitterness can also wreak havoc on the lives of others. But the one it hurts the most is actually the bitter person himself.

Scripture speaks very specifically to the issue of bitterness. The incredible book of Hebrews says, “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 like the picture brought out in this passage. Bitterness is really like a weed—a noxious weed. Here’s how it works in our lives. Someone hurts you, either by words, an action, or even by a look. “Hurt” is the seed that is planted in the soil of your heart. It sprouts roots and begins to grow. As you dwell on the hurt and the conduct done against you, the roots grow deeper and deeper. More hurts are like more seeds planted in the soil and as you continue to ponder and dwell upon the wrong done to you, it is like watering and pouring miracle grow on the weed of bitterness. Slowly, bitterness takes over and begins to choke out all spiritual life.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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Joy in Christ and perhaps a once-infectious love for Him is now zapped from the heart. Internally you begin to shrivel up and the desire you once held to know, love, and serve Christ slowly fades into a distant memory. Bitterness works that way because bitterness resides in a heart that refuses to forgive. Lou Priolo writes, "Bitterness is the result of not forgiving others. If you are bitter at someone it means that you haven't truly forgiven that person."

So what do you do with bitterness? What we have considered previously is that we must start off with admitting that we have a problem with bitterness. For some people, getting to this simple first step is brutally hard. Second, it was noted that we need to remember that God is up to something in your life, even through the tragic events that ignited the bitterness. We know from Romans 8:29 that God is at work taking everything and working it together for good and that good is that He is making you like Jesus Christ. In fact, this is so critical because as noted above in the Hebrews passage, without holiness no one will see the Lord. You and I must be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

But we dare not stop there. If you are going to deal with bitterness in your life, you must run to the foot of the cross. Ponder with me for a moment the incredible cross of Christ Jesus. Certainly if there was anyone who had the "right" to be angry and bitter it was Christ. Would you not agree. Imagine living a life of perfection -no mistakes, no sin, no shortcomings. Of serving and giving and loving and helping people. And then you are betrayed by one of your closest friends, deserted by your other friends and denied even being known by your best friend. Oh, but there's more. Then imagine being falsely accused, of being sentenced to the most horrific process of death imaginable at the time, of being beaten beyond recognition, of having a crown of thorns smashed into your skull, and to be mocked and scorned, and eventually taken to a hill outside of the city to be crucified. Don't move on too quickly from what we are pondering here. You see, it would be one thing had Jesus been like you and me-rotten to the core and the core is rotten. It would be one thing if he had committed horrific crimes or betrayed His people and mocked their God. But instead, the perfect man— 100 percent man— is nailed to a Roman cross. That in and of itself ought to cause us in our battle with

bitterness, to stop dead in our tracks and to change our perspective. But there's more. Imagine having a perfect never ending relationship with your father and then in the midst of the anguish of rejection, betrayal, and physical torment, your father actually turns away from you and now for the first time in eternity there is separation between you and your father. And remember, you did nothing wrong. You see the biblical text says that Jesus became a propitiation for us. He satisfied the eternal, just wrath of God when He was on the Roman cross. The Scriptures say that "He became sin for us." It isn't that Jesus Christ became a sinner while He was on the cross but rather, when He was on the cross, God the Father treated Him as if He had committed every sin that you and I would ever commit. That includes bitterness. Ponder it deeply. Don't brush past it. God the Father treating Jesus Christ as if he were the most bitter person on the planet. Why did He do this. Well 2 Corinthians 5:21 goes on to tell us that God the Father did this to Jesus Christ so that He could in turn treat us as if we were totally righteous. In your bitterness, stop and ponder the reality of the cross of Christ. There's more still to how we can deal with the battle against bitterness, but we must spend extensive time here. All our hope for victory over the poison of bitterness is rooted in the one glorious event known as the crucifixion. So, in your battle with bitterness, admit you have the battle; understand that God is making you like Christ through all of the events that have lead up to the bitterness, and that Christ took the hit for you so that you could have a standing of righteousness before the face of your Creator. Run to the cross. Stand at the foot of the cross, and consider He who was bruised for our iniquities, who took our chastisement, whose body was broken for us and whose blood was shed for us. Stare long and hard at the cross of Christ. Be cross-eyed, if you will, for it is hard to dwell in the sewage of bitterness when you ponder the innocent crucified Savior.

Next month we'll consider some more elements to how we can possibly deal with the bitterness that rages against our soul.



Q&A with Pastor Blake Shaw

Question: How would you respond to the accusation, "Grace Bible Church is really soft on dealing with abuse"?

Answer: This is perhaps, by far, the most difficult question ever put forward for me to answer in the COG. Since that is so, let me put forward some clarification points to get started: 1) A fully fleshed out answer for this will take several editions of the COG, so be patient. 2) Abuse is a horrific issue, to be certain. 3) Abuse characterizes the world we live in. 4) We fool ourselves if we think abuse is not happening in the lives of people who make up the church. Abuse happens and it happens more than any of us care to admit. 5) Because of the nature of abuse, there is oftentimes an incredible silence about it from the one being abused. 6) Abuse is actually a form of suffering. 7) Not having experienced abuse, as it is normally defined, I write as a fellow sufferer and want to gently and biblically address this huge issue. 8) Not all abuse cases are so neatly packaged that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with abuse. 9) This question is a challenge to answer because I run the risk of being

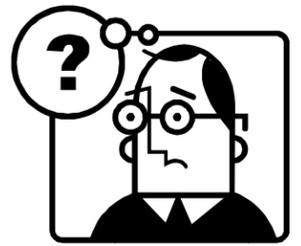


self-serving as I respond to the accusation. I'd simply state at this point that I don't think it is a fair evaluation of the church, especially given the fact that the comment came from someone outside the church who really has very little understanding of all of the details of the many abuse cases we have dealt with and has heard only one side of some of the abuse cases. 10) Perhaps the hardest, most challenging issue to handle accurately in the counseling room is the issue involving abuse. I'll try to unpack some of these points in this article.

I believe it is critical to start off with understanding that the issue of abuse is not only a horrific situation but is a predominant theme within

our world. Abuse is not something new to our world, nor is it a Western Hemisphere issue alone. Abuse has been around really since the fall of mankind into sin. In fact, the very first case of recorded abuse is found in Genesis 4 where the abuse actually ended up with the death of a man named Abel. All at the hands of his own brother. The Bible is replete with examples of abuse. Wherever you have sin and sinners, there will be abuse. That reality does not excuse abuse or lessen the saddening nature of such. It merely gives us an understanding of the origination of abuse and helps us understand that the American culture is not the first to deal with on-going abuse. Within the context of this discussion let me mention that I believe that there are three forms of abuse that must be dealt with: Physical Abuse, Verbal Abuse, and Sexual Abuse. Some might say, "You lost me Blake, because there is also Emotional Abuse and Mental Abuse." In response I would say that I simply would put these other forms of abuse under the first three headings, especially since I am not totally sure how emotions can be abused, but clearly verbal abuse works over the mind (mental) and the emotions. As a side note, let me also state that I wouldn't fight to the death over the forms of abuse issue, because to me, that is not the real point. Abuse is abuse and it is just wrong, regardless of what label one puts on it. Sexual abuse and physical abuse are illegal actions and should be dealt with by law enforcement. But when we come to verbal abuse there is no law enforced recourse to take. In my counseling experience, verbal abuse is the most prominent feature of the three abuses that take place.

If I may at this point, I'd like to take on point #10 above to help the reader understand why abuse is the most challenging issue to handle accurately. It would be so helpful, when counseling a person, that one could perhaps be a fly on the wall in the home (or wherever the abuse takes place). Abuse, though not restricted to the home (abuse takes place in the work force, school,



Abuse is abuse and it is just wrong, regardless of what label one puts on it.

church, social gatherings, etc.), most often takes place within the home, behind closed doors where no one is a witness to the event(s). Because of this reality, counseling gets fairly difficult to pull off. The abused person, usually after taking abuse for an extended period of time (often years), will come for counseling and will share about what is happening in the home. This is a critical step because in many abuse cases the abused will oftentimes be reticent to share about the abuse. Who can really blame the person, given the fact that there is potential for more abuse to follow once the abuser finds out that the abused has shared with someone else the details of the situation. There is risk involved for sure. The fact that the person has opened up about this issue is, however, a critical first step.

There is a huge challenge facing the counselor still at this point. Proverbs 18:17 cautions the counselor to hear both sides of the story and Proverbs 18:13 tells us that if we dole out an answer before we hear, it is folly and shame to us. Immediately the counselor finds himself in a quandary. How does the counselor respond to this? If he doesn't accept the person's account at face-value, he can be dismissed as uncaring, yet, if he embraces the story as presented, he runs the risk of practicing folly and shame. I've been and done both.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

- **Medical Issues In Counseling-Taught by Dan and Pam Gannon; Starts in January, on Sunday mornings, 9:00am to 10:15am in Room 802.**
- **Gospel Treason (Getting to the Sin Beneath the Sin)-Lead by Pastor Blake Shaw, taught by Pastor Brad Bigney. Starts in January, on Sunday mornings, 10:45am to 12:00 noon. Fireside Room.**
- **Second Annual Biblical Counseling Conference-July 24-26, Grace Bible Church. Information and registration forms available soon.**

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