**Part 1 of Session 1: Mining the Richness of God’s Word: God’s Treasures of Wisdom—Colossians 1**

I’ve spoken many times in Track 4. Don’t tell the other tracks, but you’re my favorite! In most of my Track 4 session, I’ve focused on specific counseling issues such as anxiety, depression, sexual abuse, or suffering. We’ve explored how to understand these issues biblically, and how to care compassionately. In my two hours with you today, our focus is a bit different and broader.

I want us to think about how we build a robust, rich, relevant, and relational model of biblical counseling. I believe this is appropriate for Track 4 because I see you men and women not only as *doers* of the work of biblical counseling, but as *equippers* of biblical counselor and as *leaders* of our movement.

On the cover page of your handout, you’ll find this summary of our focus:

Where do we find wisdom for life in a broken world? Of course, we all would agree on a two-word answer: “*God’s Word.”* But how do we *view* and *use* God’s Word in biblical counseling richly, robustly, and relevantly? In this session, we’ll discover that our imaginations must become captive to Scripture so that the *Bible’s redemptive narrative* becomes the governing framework for how we speak truth in love. We’ll learn that our role is to help one another to see our life stories in light of the story of *Christ’s gospel of grace*.

So here’s what we’re asking today, stated two different ways:

* How do we capture the big story of the Bible so that the main message of our counseling is built upon the main message of the Bible?
* What does gospel-centered biblical counseling look like?

Being “gospel-centered” is a phrase we hear all the time today. If we’re not careful it can become a buzz word with little concrete meaning. That’s a shame, because “gospel-centered” is *not* a buzz word. Today, we want to take that phrase, “gospel-centered” and apply it to biblical counseling. We want to ponder what a gospel-centered model of biblical counseling looks like as we minister to real people with real problems in a real and relevant way. We want think *specifically* about how the gospel should shape biblical counseling.

There’s something else that’s different about my time with you in Track 4 today. *I’m not going to cover all my notes.* In fact, be ready to be shocked. Those who know me know I plan well, I focus well, we fill in every blank, and we cover the entire lesson without racing through the last two-thirds like a sprint. But here’s what’s different. I’m not even going to start to address the *second* session. Rather than race through this first session, I want us to wade deeply into it and interact about it. So both this hour and the hour after the break will focus on the first four pages of your notes on *Mining the Riches of God’s Word*.

Now, I said I know Track 4 people well. I do. And I know that you’re like me. You deal with *Obsessive-Compulsive Blank Filling-in Disorder*. Some of you are near a panic attack right now because I said we’re not even going to touch the second set of notes!

Here’s my “therapy” for you. I will upload the completed outline—with blanks filled in, the entire PowerPoint presentation, and the entire manuscript—every word I would have said to you in the second section of notes. You can download all of that *for free* at <http://bit.ly/BCTC2014>. In fact, the outline, PowerPoint, and manuscript for this first lesson will there, too. Is that fair? We’ll cover this first section of notes *in detail*. Then you will have the *first and the second* section of notes completely manuscripted.

* **Ashley’s Story, Nate’s Questions, and Your Responses…**
* **Ashley’s Story…**

So, back to gospel-centered biblical counseling. To help us to grapple with how Christ’s gospel of grace relates to biblical counseling, let’s ponder *Ashley’s story, Nate’s questions, and our responses*.

Ashley and her husband, Nate, met with me at church the day after their twin sons’ eleventh birthday. With tears streaming down her face, Ashley shared that twenty-five years earlier, not long after *her* eleventh birthday, a relative had begun sexually abusing her.

Here’s how Ashley described herself in our first meeting:

“I’m the good girl from the good home. The good mom; the good wife. But nobody knows the ugliness I feel inside. Nobody knows how I’ve pretended and denied all these years. I just can’t keep faking it any longer. I’m a mess. Depressed to the point that at times I’ve thought about suicide. Always fearful and anxious—terrified I’ll displease someone. Terrified someone will find out what an empty but evil thing I am…”

As Ashley’s voice trailed off, Nate asked:

* **Nate’s Question: “Pastor Bob, can you *help*? Does the Bible offer any *hope* for my wife?”**

So…how would *you* respond to Nate’s two questions? “Can you *help*?” “Does the Bible offer any *hope*?” Take a moment with someone next to you to summarize your response to Nate’s two questions.

* **Our Responses…**

How we respond to Ashley’s soul struggles and Nate’s life questions depends on how we answer two ultimate life questions about God’s Word:

1. **Where do we find wisdom for life in a broken world?**
2. **How do we *view and use* God’s Word for the personal ministry of the Word?**

As we’ve said, we all know the two word answer to question one*—“God’s Word.”* But what do we mean by that? Do we “cherry-pick” a couple of verses and apply them like a band-aide onto Ashley’s life? Or, is there something more to it? The something more relates to how we *view and use* God’s Word. Is it simply an answer book? Is it simply an academic textbook for counseling? Or, is there a *redemptive theme or thread* running through God’s Word that must capture our hearts so that our counseling communicates God’s heart?

**I. You *Can* Handle the Truth**

**A. Three Ways the Church Often Responds to Folks Like Ashley and Nate**

When dear folks like Ashley and Nate courageously share their raw concerns with people in the church, I’ve noticed that some Christians tend to respond in one of three typical ways. And none of these ways do justice to the overriding message God is communicating in His Word.

**1. Refer**

If Ashley came to some churches, some people would *refer*. The stereotype goes something like this:

“I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggle. However, we have to understand that while the Bible provides insight for our ‘spiritual lives,’ God never intended that we use His Word to address ‘emotional and mental’ struggles. For relevant help for those issues, we need outside experts.”

There’s confidence in God, but with a corresponding conviction that for “non-spiritual issues” God’s Word is not the most appropriate resource. Our church is in the midst of a search for a new pastor and our application form includes several questions about the candidate’s perspective on counseling. Sadly, the vast majority of candidates—trained at some of the Evangelical world’s best seminaries—follow the “refer” approach.

**2. Sprinkle**

Some churches follow a *sprinkling* approach. The stereotype goes something like this:

“I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggles. To the insights I’ve gleaned from the world’s wisdom about your issue, I’ll add Christian concern, prayer, and some occasional biblical principles where they seem pertinent.”

There’s confidence in God’s Word as important in helping hurting people, but its application lacks an understanding of the vital, comprehensive, and robust nature of God’s Word for life in a broken world. I teach pastoral counseling as an adjunct professor at several seminaries where the overall model is not a biblical counseling model. Sadly, most students at those seminaries come into my class having been taught this “sprinkle” approach.

**3. Concordance**

Some churches and counselors follow the *concordance* approach. The stereotype goes something like this:

“I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggle. You have a problem. I’ll use my Bible concordance to find God’s answer.” Some have called this the “one-problem, one-verse, one- solution” approach.

There’s confidence in the Bible, but its application lacks an understanding of the complexity of life and the rich nature of the underlying story God is telling in His Word. An example of this is the pastor who addresses anxiety issues simply by quoting Philippians 4:6 and exhorting people to be anxious for nothing. They miss the gospel-centered focus that runs throughout Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

* + **Why do you think we follow these shallow approaches?**

With a partner ponder why “we” or “other people” might follow these more shallow approaches.

I believe that we follow approaches like *refer*, *sprinkle*, and *concordance* because:

* We have failed to ponder how the Bible’s storyline should shape our counseling relationships to broken people in a broken world.

**B. A Fourth Way: The Gospel Narrative Way**

So, let’s ponder how the Bible’s storyline relates to biblical counseling. Let’s start with this question:

* + **In 8 words or less, what is your current best attempt to capture the Bible’s central message?**

Go ahead, take some time to ponder and answer that question… What did you come up with?

* + **The Bible As…**

In your notes, I’ve summarized the Bible’s storyline as “The Gospel Narrative Way.” Let’s develop that further with some additional phrases that seek to capture the Bible’s central message.

**1. The Drama of Redemption**

First, some summarize the Bible’s message in just four words, calling it: *The Drama of Redemption*. Kevin Vanhoozer, for instance, thinks of the Bible as a *theo-drama* with a compelling narrative of God’s pursuit of prodigals and adulterers. Think of Hosea as an OT summary of the Bible’s message and think of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a NT summary of the Bible’s main story. We are God’s prodigal children and adulterous spouse—and God pursues us relentlessly and passionately—that’s the storyline of the Bible.

**2. A War and a Wedding**

In *Soul Physicians*, I summarize the Bible’s narrative in five words as: *A War and a Wedding*. God begins by telling the story of relationship initiated in Genesis 1-2 and then moves to relationship rejected in Genesis 3. After those first three chapters, the rest of the Bible tells the story of God wooing us back to His holy and loving arms, all the while fighting the Evil One who wants to seduce us away from our first love. Ever since Genesis 3, *life is a battle for our love*—the ageless question of who captures our heart—Christ or Satan.

**3. Slay the Dragon; Marry the Damsel**

Others have described it picturesquely in six words as: *Slay the Dragon; Marry the Damsel*. Think of Revelation 19. We have the wedding where God marries the damsel—the marriage supper of the Lamb. And we have the war where God slays the dragon—the great supper of God.

Many sports fans, if they can’t watch the big game when it’s live, DVR it. Then they swear all their friends to secrecy. “Don’t you dare spoil it for me! Don’t tell me who won. I want to watch it and enjoy the thrill of the entire game without knowing the outcome.”

I guess I’m odd. When I can’t watch the big game live, I DVR it. However, *I watch the end first!* Especially if the big game involves one of my beloved teams. I’m a big-time fan of the Chicago Bulls. Back when Michael Jordan was leading them toward what would become the first of six NBA titles, I recorded (Beta—this was a *long* time ago) the NBA final’s game between the Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers. If the Bulls were victorious, they would win their first-ever world championship.

Now, you have to understand something about Chicago sports fans. Chicago teams *always* choke. As a child, I had been through the epic collapse of the 1969 Chicago Cubs to the “Miracle Mets.” And that was just the first of many such heartbreaks as a Chicago fan. So, a Chicago sports fan can *never* relax, no matter how sure the final outcome might *seem*.

That’s why, after I recorded the Bulls game, I first *watched the end of the game!* The Bulls won! Michael Jordan and all of Chicago celebrated! Then, after watching the celebration, I rewound the tape and watched the entire game.

When the Bulls were behind by 17 points, I never panicked. Normally I would have left the room if they were behind by that much. I would have told my son to call me back into the living room only if the Bulls tied the game. I couldn’t take watching them struggle. But not this time. I knew the end of the story. So I could handle the ups and downs of the game, knowing the final result.

Whether or not you agree with my sports-watching philosophy, you can see the benefits we gain from knowing the end of God’s story—the end of *our* story. We’ve read the end of the gospel story. God wins! And we win! God wins the war and weds His bride. He slays the dragon and weds the damsel—us.

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:6b-7).

**4. Paul’s Answer: Christ’s Gospel Victory!**

In Colossians 1, Paul summarizes the good news of the Bible’s storyline in three words: *Christ’s Gospel Victory!* The Colossians had *all sorts of problems—*suffering, sin, lust, rage, harsh husbands, fathers who embittered their children. Paul could have started with “how to’s,” “steps,” and “principles.” But that’s what the secular world was giving the Colossians—rules, regulations, and principles. In Colossians 1, Paul begins by telling the gospel victory story—for their salvation and for their sanctification.

“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth” (Colossians 1:6).

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness (the war/slaying the dragon) and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (the wedding/marrying the damsel” (Colossians 1:13-14).

The epi-center of the book of God—the Gospels—is nothing less than a *victory narrative*. We sometimes forget that Gospels were a common literary form in the ancient Near East. Whenever a great king won a major victory, he commissioned the writing of a gospel—a vivid retelling of the good news of the vanquished enemy and the victorious king. This glorious good news was told again and again, often from multiple points of views, to exalt the king and encourage his people.

Let’s summarize everything we’ve said so far in a tweet-size format:

* **A Tweet to Remember:** *To view the Bible confidently and use the Bible competently we must understand the Bible’s story the way God tells it—as a gospel victory narrative*.

Our counseling of Ashley and Nate will be sterile and dead if we see the Bible as an academic textbook. But if we view and use the Bible as the story—the gospel-centered drama—of the battle to win our hearts, then our one-another ministry comes alive to Ashley and Nate.

When Nate asks, “Does the Bible offer any hope for my wife?” we should be ready to jump out of our chair! “Hope? Hope! Man, that’s what the Bible is alllll about!” However, before we jump out of our chair, we might want to say something like:

“Oh, yes, Nate, the Bible offers amazing hope. But before we talk about the details of that hope, I can tell that your hope and Ashley’s hope has been crushed. And I’m so, so sorry. So, I’d like to hear about that crushed hope so that as we talk about Christ’s hope, we zero in on exactly the hope you and Ashley most need…”

**II. Looking for Answers in All the Wrong Places**

This is exactly the type of compassionate, gospel-centered counseling Paul was doing with the Colossians. As Paul wrote to the believers in Colosse, their situation mirrored ours. Though forgiven and welcomed home by God through Christ (Colossians 1:13, 22):

* *They Were Facing Suffering*: Condemnation from Satan (Colossians 1:22), judgment by others (Colossians 2:16), interpersonal grievances and struggles (Colossians 3:13, 15), and family discord (Colossians 3:19-21).
* *They Were Battling Temptation to Sin*: Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, and lying (Colossians 3:5-9).

And just like us, many voices were clamoring for their attention, claiming to have cornered the market on the secret steps to wholeness (Colossians 2:4, 8). They were being given all sorts of counsel—much of it unbiblical, and none of it gospel-centered.

**A. The Colossians and Us: “Dear Brother Paul”**

To capture their situation, I imagine Paul receiving a letter something like this from one of these saints, sons, sufferers, and sinners:

Dear Brother Paul,

I’m confused. No. Not about my salvation. I know I’m saved. I’ve received Christ’s grace by faith. What I’m confused about is life. Not only mine, but the Christians around me. I look around and see saints who struggle just like sinners. Our relationships are not just messy, but often a mess. Our homes are sometimes harsh and cold places. At times we seem to handle suffering little differently than those who do not know Christ. I see Christians who have no sense of who they are in Christ. They seem to sway between self-hatred and self-sufficiency.

What is the gospel sufficient for? Heaven only? If grace is so sufficient, then why do we seem to be so ineffectual in our lives and relationships? But here’s where I really get confused. It seems like some folks feel as if the church doesn’t have *wisdom for real life*, yet the world sure claims it does! Every time I turn around, I hear about some new answer, some new approach to life, some new philosophy of life claiming to tell me what life is all about, how to live the good life, and how to make sense of my messed up life.

One day it’s a group alleging to have some special corner on the truth, some secret success sauce that they’ve been initiated into that I *must* learn. The next day it’s another group saying I have to work harder, follow all their rules and regulations. The third day it’s the philosopher-types with all their fine-sounding reasonings about emotions, relationships, and right thinking.

While they all contradict each other, they all have one message in common. They all seem to be saying that *my Christianity is not enough*. They all demand that I *mix* Christ’s wisdom for living with their wisdom for living. It’s like I can keep my Christianity, but I have to *add* their secrets. I need Christianity *plus* their new way of thinking. I need Christianity *plus* their new way of living. I’m supposed to use my Christianity and plug in their steps. So, Brother Paul, is Christianity all I need or what? If Christ is sufficient, do I really need something more? And if the gospel is sufficient not only for eternal life but for daily life now, then why doesn’t it seem sufficient to me and the rest of us? I know you’re busy, but if you could find time to reply, I sure would appreciate it.

*Brother Theophilus*

**1. God’s Word: Relational and Relevant: Colossians 1:28-2:3**

Though the letter is imaginary, it captures the real and raw life situation that motivated Paul to craft the letter that we know as Colossians. Using our imaginations again, perhaps we picture Paul, in response to this letter, stoically pondering, fingertip to temple—as if shepherding the Colossians was some academic exercise for Paul. Nothing could be further from the truth as Paul describes it in Colossians 1:28-2:3.

“We proclaim him, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 1:28-2:3).

Paul models for us counseling that is passionate and compassionate, other-centered and Christ-dependent.

Paul’s mission in this life-and-death contest is to relate gospel truth to the Colossians’ relationship:

* *With God:* That they would be mature in Christ
* W*ith One Another:* That they would be united in love
* *With Themselves:* That they would be encouraged in heart (Colossians 1:28; 2:2).

Paul models counseling that sees God’s Word as relational and relevant to life in our broken world.

**2. God’s Word: Rich and Robust: Colossians 1:27-2:3**

Paul also models counseling that is gospel-centered and Christ-focused. If Ashley and Nate had come to Paul asking about hope, instead of allowing the pressure to provide a quick answer to drive him to simplistic solutions, Paul would go “big picture.” He would focus on the larger story—the *largest* story:

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Let’s be honest, if Nate asked us, “Can you help? Does the Bible offer us any hope?” we might panic and be tempted to think. “I’ve got to come up with an answer! Three steps to overcoming sexual abuse.”

Now, Paul would certainly have practical wisdom for Nate and Ashley, but before he addressed practical wisdom, he would re-introduce them to the One who *is* wisdom.

That’s what Paul does with the Colossians and their struggles. Rather than offering smaller story “steps” or “keys,” Paul invites his Colossian friends to journey with him on a treasure hunt so:

“They may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3).

Pie-in-the-sky? Too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good? That’s what the Colossians were being told. And it’s what the world tells us today. The gospel might be good for “spiritual stuff,” for heaven, but for life today you need Christ+ the world’s secret steps, or the gospel+ rules and regulations, or Scripture+ three principles, or Christianity+ the world’s wisdom. We might call that view “the Deficiency of Christ, the gospel, Scripture, and Christianity.”

Paul’s Colossians model of biblical counseling is what motivates us to ask the question:

* **What would it look like to develop an approach to the personal ministry of the Word built solely upon Christ’s gospel of grace?**

It was this Christ-centered worldview that led the BCC to explain gospel-centered counseling as:

We point people to a person, Jesus our Redeemer, and not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transforming power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people’s hearts, not in any human system of change. People need a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus, not a system of self-salvation, self-management, or self-actualization. Wise counselors seek to lead struggling, hurting, sinning, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are available only in Christ.

We summarize the entire mission of the BCC as:

*Promoting Personal Change Centered on the Person of Christ through the Personal Ministry of the Word*

Christ is the hope that we offer Ashley and Nate. *It is in Christ that Ashley and Nate will find rich treasures of wisdom for their life in their broken world.* Christ’s victory narrative where Satan, sin, and suffering are destroyed is the hope that we offer Ashley and Nate. *Biblical* counseling must understand and be built upon the *Bible’s* gospel victory narrative.

**III. The Gospel for Real Life: Heaven Invading Earth**

This was Paul’s *biblical* counsel for the Colossians. He called them back to the supremacy of Christ and the gospel for salvation *and for life today*—rich wisdom for life in a broken world. That’s what Paul meant in Colossians 1:6:

“All over the world this gospel *is* bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing *since* the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth” (Colossians 1:6).

For Paul, *the gospel is for Christians!* It is the gospel that will empower Ashley to bear fruit and to grow even in the midst of the horrific pain and shame she feels over her past sexual abuse.

Before Paul started addressing the specifics of the Colossian’s struggles (which he does in Colossians 3 and 4), he first addresses the glories of the gospel. I think Paul Tripp captures well the heartbeat and message of the Apostle Paul, when Tripp asks:

* **What Story Motivates Us:** “What is the best news you can imagine? What is your reason for getting up in the morning? What is so significant that you will build your whole life around it?”

The Apostle Paul’s answer is “the good news—the gospel.” If Christ’s gospel victory narrative is not the foundation beneath what we’re offering Ashley, then we may as well offer her cognitive-behavioral therapy, or rational-emotive therapy, or any of the 250 secular therapy models that we could choose from.

* **Christ’s Story and People’s Story…**

Now, that doesn’t mean that when people come to us, we shout, “Gospel!” as if it’s some magic wand. That would be just as shallow as the “Concordance Approach” of one problem-one verse-one solution.

Instead, as biblical counselors we start by understanding and being captivated by the gospel victory story. Next we seek to deeply understand our friend’s story. Then we journey *together* with our friend to *intersect* God’s eternal story and their temporal story. That’s what I mean by “heaven invading earth”—God’s eternal story interprets and impacts our earthly story.

I picture it as pivoting back and forth with our friends between the larger story of the gospel and the smaller, but real and meaningful, story of their life. We earn the right to bring God’s perspective to bear on our friends’ lives by first listening well to their life story.

So, when Nate asks, “Can you help?” we say, humbly:

“Yes, I believe that through Christ and the wisdom of His Word, that we can find *amazing* help. To move toward that, I’d really like to hear what help would look like for you and Ashley. (Then, looking to Ashley) Ashley, move ahead mentally several months. Imagine that our time together has been ‘helpful.’ What would that be like? How would things be different for you?”

* **Gospel for Real Life: Dr. Lawlor’s Story**

Everything we’ve pondered to this point has had one focus—to introduce us to the Bible’s big picture—the gospel victory narrative. Next we’re going to explore how the Bible develops this victory narrative, and what difference each act in the Drama of Redemption makes in how we build a biblical model of counseling and how we counsel biblically.

Theologians often summarize the gospel storyline with the phrase: “The CFR Narrative” for Creation, Fall, and Redemption. You’ve heard that, I’m sure. Likely you’ve used it, as I have. Long before the “gospel-centered craze,” Dr. John Lawlor at Baptist Bible College introduced the CFR Narrative to me and 100 other intimidated freshmen in OT Survey. He walked in the first day of class and said, “Repeat after me. ‘Creation. Fall. Redemption.’” And we did. Then he said, “If you remember those three words, then you understand the entire storyline, not just of the OT, but of the entire Bible.”

* **Paul’s Story: CCFRCC—The Good News as the Epi-Center of the Good Book**

I think the CFR Narrative is a very helpful way to capture how the Bible develops the gospel storyline. However, in Colossians 1, the Apostle Paul develops the CRF Narrative *even further* as he helps the Colossians and us to understand the gospel narrative by placing it within the context of eternity and time. In Colossians 1, Paul develops the Bible’s redemptive storyline using the “CCFRCC Narrative.”

* **Prologue: *C*ommunity—Before the Beginning/Eternity Past**
* **Act I: *C*reation—In the Beginning**
* **Act II: *F*all: The End of the Beginning**
* **Act III: *R*edemption—Eternity Invades Time**
* **Act IV: *C*hurch—In the Fullness of Time**
* **Epilogue: *C*onsummation—After the End/Eternity Future**

Paul doesn’t start with creation and humanity. Instead, Paul begins *before the beginning*, in eternity past, with Deity—with the Trinity in eternal community. *Then* Paul moves to Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Notice also that Paul highlights an additional “act”—the church. He doesn’t move directly from Redemption to Consummation. Instead, he reminds us that that *sanctification is a community journey*. And just as Paul began before the beginning, he concludes after the end—with eternity future.

Like Kevin Vanhoozer, the Apostle Paul sees the Bible as theo-drama. It’s a four-act play surrounded by a prologue and an epilogue. I can capture that gospel storyline in less than 75 words:

Our Trinitarian God (Community) invites us into relationship with Himself (Creation). The dragon invades the story and seduces God’s wife to commit spiritual adultery (Fall). God pursues His adulterous spouse sending His Son to slay the dragon and wed His bride (Redemption). The Bride of Christ remains on earth to herald the good news of the Gospel (Church) awaiting *the Day* when the war is won and the wedding march is played (Consummation).

This is *not* theology *un*related to life. This *is* the stuff of life. And it provides us with a robust answer to life’s first ultimate question:

“Where do we find wisdom for life in our broken world?”

We find wisdom in gospel-centered counseling:

* **Gospel-Centered Counseling: Deriving our understanding of earthly life from the lens of Christ’s gospel victory!**

Together with our counselees we look at their life story through the theo-drama of “slay the dragon; marry the damsel.” We interpret their life story though the narrative of “life is a war and a wedding.”

In the second half of our time today, we’ll look at each act in the Drama of Redemption. But before we do, I’d like us to think about a “take-away” at this point. Based upon what we’ve said so far, ponder with a partner any one of these three summary questions:

* How would a focus on Christ’s *Gospel Victory Narrative* impact the *Refer, Sprinkle,* and *Concordance* approaches to helping people?
* What difference could a focus on Christ’s *Gospel Victory Narrative* make in how you *view and use* the Bible for biblical counseling?
* What difference could a focus on Christ’s *Gospel Victory Narrative* make in your life?

**Part 2 of Session 1: Mining the Richness of God’s Word: God’s Treasures of Wisdom—Colossians 1**

If you’re listening on the tape and expecting to find *Wisdom for Life in a Broken World*, my apologies. Instead, I’m continuing to discuss the previous Track 4 session, *Mining the Riches of God’s Word*. If you would like the entire completed outline, entire PowerPoint presentation, and full manuscript for *Wisdom for Life in a Broken World*, you can go to the following link and download it for free: <http://bit.ly/BCTC2014>. In fact, you’ll also find the outline, PowerPoint, and manuscript for the previous session.

In this session, we’ll complete our study of Colossians 1 and *Mining the Riches of God’s Word*. From Colossians 1 we are studying what I’ve called Paul’s “CCFRCC Narrative.” His gospel-centered biblical counseling model of *C*ommunity, *C*reation, *F*all, *R*edemption, *C*hurch, and *C*onsummation.

* **Prologue: *C*ommunity—Before the Beginning/Eternity Past**
* **Act I: *C*reation—In the Beginning**
* **Act II: *F*all: The End of the Beginning**
* **Act III: *R*edemption—Eternity Invades Time**
* **Act IV: *C*hurch—In the Fullness of Time**
* **Epilogue: *C*onsummation—After the End/Eternity Future**

We’ll spend the rest of our time relating this “CCFRCC Narrative” to how we view and use the Bible for biblical counseling. We’ll explore each of these “acts” in the Bible’s Drama of Redemption and with each “act” we’ll craft an *ultimate life question*. Then we’ll highlight how those questions help us to build a gospel-centered approach to biblical counseling.

**A. *C*ommunity: Listen to the Creator of Life for Wisdom for Living**

Paul’s Colossian’s counseling model starts with the Prologue—Community: listening to the Creator of life for wisdom for living. One of the central issues any counseling approach must address is:

* **Where does our counseling model begin?**

Every secular counseling model, by definition, must begin with *humanity*—with who *we* are. That is why secular counseling theories are *never neutral*. They exclude God from their foundation.

Gospel-centered counseling begins *before the beginning* with God in Trinitarian community. Gospel-centered counseling begins with who is God and what difference He makes in how we look at and live life in a broken world. That’s why Paul doesn’t start with “once upon a time.” He begins before time, in eternity past by reintroducing the Colossians to the cosmic Christ in Colossians 1:15-19.

15“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”

It’s as if Paul says, “You could try to understand the creature by the creature (worldly wisdom), or, you could turn to the Creator to understand the creature.” Since “all things were created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16); turn to Him.

And it’s as if Paul says, “Is your life falling apart? Do you feel like you’re coming unglued? You could turn to yourself (the creature) or you could turn to the Creator—the One in whom ‘all things hold together’” (Colossians 1:17).

Paul’s focus on the cosmic Christ suggests *life’s ultimate question* related to God, Community, and the Prologue:

* **What comes into our mind when we think about God? Whose view of God will we believe—Christ’s or Satan’s?**

There is no issue in life or in counseling more important than our view of God. As. A.W. Tozer said:

*“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important fact about us.”*

As I began to counsel Ashley, we uncovered pretty quickly that she was being tempted to believe Satan’s view of God, which was stark and dark, bleak and miserable:

*“God is sovereign. He could have stopped your abuse. He did not. God does not care about you.”*

If I had ignored Ashley’s view of God, we would have never helped her to find hope and healing.

Paul also addresses a very practical biblical counseling question:

* **What does love look like? From whom do we learn how to live and how to love?**

Paul says, “You want to know how relationships work? Then turn to the Eternal Community of Oneness—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Paul describes it beautifully in Colossians 1:13 when he speaks of the Father bringing us into the kingdom “of the Son he loves.”

Before God created, *He related.* “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God” (John 1:1). The Trinity always enjoys the sheer delight of eternal, unbroken communion, connection, and community. Their love teaches Ashley how to love—even in a broken world.

It also directs our thinking when Nate says, “Can you help”? I wanted to help Ashley in many ways—with her grief, her sorrow, her suffering, her emotions. But ultimately I had *a Trinity-shaped definition of help*. I wanted to help Ashley to understand John 17:26 where Jesus speaks of His eternal relationship with His Father:

“I have made you known to them in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:26).

It was when Ashley began to fathom that the Father has the same love for her that He has *for Jesus*, that she stopped believing Satan’s view of God and started basking in *Jesus’ view of God*. And it was then that Ashley could begin *loving like Jesus*.

Why does biblical counseling start *before* the beginning? Because it’s only when we start with our Trinitarian God that we learn the true purpose of life and the true nature of love.

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the ultimate life question related to God/Community:

* **What comes into our mind when we think about God? Whose view of God will we believe—Christ’s or Satan’s?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions?

**B. *C*reation: The Way Things Were Meant to Be**

Secular counseling models skip Deity and start with humanity. Sometimes biblical counseling models move directly from God to the Fall/depravity. They sometimes skip Creation and how things were meant to be. But:

* **Our understanding of people must start with Creation/design not with the Fall/depravity.**

Starting with the Fall/Depravity/Sin would be like a doctor only studying sick hearts and skipping anatomy 101. When we skip the spiritual anatomy of the soul, we lose sight of how God designed us to function and of what a healthy image bearer was supposed to look like. Remember, when God created us, he looked upon us and said, “Very good!” Before sin, humanity was God’s masterpiece, His opus—created in His image.

The first act in the Drama of Redemption is Creation where our Trinitarian God invites us into a *worshipful, dependent relationship*—where God invites us into the community shared by the Trinity. Creation teaches us to ask the following ultimate life questions:

* **Who am I? Whose are we? In what story do we find ourselves?**

Secular models of counseling only ask the first part of this three-fold question: *“Who am I?”* That leaves God out of the picture. “Who am I?” can become very self-centered and self-focused and it can lead self-sufficiency and self-trust.

But in Colossians, Paul describes us as being created *by* God and *for* God. Notice again Colossians 1:16-17.

16“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

We were not made to live *for* ourselves. Image bearers were made “for him” (Colossians 1:16). And we were not made to live *by* ourselves. Image bearers were made to be dependent upon Him—“in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). Asking *“Whose am I?”* shifts our focus from ourselves in isolation to ourselves in-relationship-to-Deity. We are always in-relationship-to-God-beings.

This leads to a very practical question for the broken counselees, like Ashley, who come to see us for help:

* **What does it look like to live a whole life in a broken world?**

From Creation, from the beginning, a whole life has always meant living as:

* *Dependent worshipping beings*.

Think about that phrase—*dependent worshipping beings*. We were made by God—from the dust of the earth as God breathed the breath of life into our lifeless flesh. We are *dependent* beings. And we were made for God. We are *worshipping* beings.

Let’s relate this to Ashley. She was made:

* To Cling to Christ: She’s a dependent being.
* To Love Christ: She’s a worshipping being.

When Nate asked the question, “Pastor Bob, can you help my wife?” very likely he was influenced by the world’s definition of life and of help. He was asking, “Bob, can you help my wife to love herself again? Can you help my wife to take care of herself again?” Returning to Creation gives us a very different definition of “help.” So we would want to communicate to Nate and Ashley:

“Yes, God offers help and hope for Ashley. Ashley can learn to worship God and enjoy Him even in the midst of the horrific heartaches and heartbreaks of life. And Ashly can learn to cling to God and find His strength to love like Jesus even in the midst of the horrific heartaches and heartbreaks of life.”

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the ultimate life question related to Creation:

* **Whose am I?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions and if you saw the answer as “I belong to God as a dependent worshipping being meant to cling to Him and love Him?”

**C. *F*all: Not the Way Things Are Supposed to Be**

I mentioned that sometimes our biblical counseling models skip Creation and go directly to the Fall. On the other hand, secular counseling models *totally* skip the Fall. Yes, they look at problems, but they don’t see problems in terms of dependent worshipful beings becoming independent false worshippers. As I said, secular counseling is *never neutral*.

In Colossians 1:21, Paul places the Fall in its rightful place and captures its nature in a sentence.

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (Colossians 1:21).

As a loving soul shepherd, Paul speaks the truth to the Colossians and to us. He informs us that apart from Christ our wills are bent only toward Satan’s *sub-version* of God’s grand narrative because our minds are under “the dominion of darkness” (Colossians 1:13).

This raises a vital question that every human being since Adam and Eve has to answer:

* **To whose counsel will we submit our hearts and minds?**

In the Drama of Redemption, here’s what we have to understand. Since the Fall, life is not just *one* grand narrative—it is a *competition* between *two* grand narratives that each vie for our attention and commitment. Satan’s grand narrative is filled with *lies*, *self*, *works*, and *condemnation*. Christ’s grand narrative is filled with *truth*, *God*, *others*, *faith*, *grace*, and *forgiveness, justification,* and *reconciliation*.

How we respond to Ashley and Nate’s plea for help and hope depends upon how we answer the question: *“To whose counsel will we submit our hearts and mind especially when life’s a mess?”*

At our church, I’m preaching a series on selected Psalms. I introduced the series by noting that the Psalms are real and raw—they talk about real life—sin and suffering—in a fallen, broken world. And I pointed out that Psalms 1 and 2 are introductions to the Psalms. Psalm 1 tells us that when life’s a mess of sin and suffering, we either look at life like the fool—through our own eyes, or we look at life like the wise person—through God’s eyes. Psalm 2 tells us that when life’s a mess of sin and suffering, we can either cling to the Messiah (“Kiss the Son” is how Psalm 2 words it), or we can fight against the Messiah (“gather together against the LORD’s Anointed” is how Psalm 2 words it).

This leads to our next ultimate life question that our fall into sin teaches us to ask and answer:

* **What’s the root source of our problem? What went wrong?**

Act 2 in the Drama of Redemption—the Fall—teaches us how to answer this question. We can trace every inch of separation, shame, sadness, and selfishness to Adam and Eve’s willful choice to choose Satan’s counsel over God’s counsel—*to choose Satan over God*.

Think about that phrase:

* To choose Satan’s counsel over God, is what we have called in the biblical counseling movement “false idols of the heart.”
* To choose Satan over God, is what the Bible calls “false lovers of the soul.”

Both of these are accurate, biblical descriptions of the root source of our problem: false idols of the heart and false lovers of the soul. But it’s instructive to note that the Bible uses images like “spiritual prostitution, spiritual adultery, and spiritual whoredom” to describe the essence of sin much more frequently than it uses the phrase “idols of the heart.”

Spiritual adultery powerfully captures the relational nature of our sin. We’re not just a thief caught in a crime; we’re adulterers caught in the act. Our gospel theo-drama teaches that our root problem is a *worship* problem; a *heart* problem; a *love* problem—choosing to *love and worship* anything or anyone more than God.

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the Fall/sin questions:

* **What’s the root source of our problem? What went wrong? To whose counsel will we submit? Who do we love? Who captures our hearts?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions and if you saw the core answer as: choosing to love and worship anything or anyone more than God?

**D. *R*edemption: Experiencing Abundant Life Today and Eternal Life Forever**

How tragic it would have been if Paul ended with the Fall—with alienation from God, domination by Satan, and our minds surrendered to false idols and our souls surrendered to false lovers. We would have *no* hope or help to offer Ashley and Nate. But God’s grand gospel narrative is a *resurrection narrative*. Death dies. Hope lives. Christ rises and we rise with Him.

* **Remembering the Victory Narrative…**

To the Colossians, Paul opens the curtain to the main movement in the Drama of Redemption—victory, resurrection. In Colossians 1:13-14 and21-22, Paul tells us that:

13“God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 21Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”

In biblical counseling we’ve often asked the redemption question like this:

* **How do people change?**

That’s a good question. But if we’re not careful it can center the change process primarily on us. Instead, I’d encourage us to ask our next ultimate life question with two questions focused on Christ:

* **How does Christ bring us peace with God? How does Christ change people?**

Paul says, “You want to know change? Let me tell you about Christ’s gospel victory! It changes us! It redeems and regenerates us—makes us a new creation in Christ. And it justifies and reconciles us—it brings us peace with God.

For a long time I only applied part of the picture of my salvation. Here’s how I pictured it. God is a holy and righteous Judge. I’m on trial before Him because of my sins. God is about to pronounce me guilty when Christ steps up and says, “Charge me instead. Put Bob’s sins on Me, and put My righteousness on Bob.” God the Judge accepts His holy Son’s payment on my behalf and declares me “Not guilty. Pardoned. Forgiven.”

That’s the amazing grace of justification. And that’s Colossians 1:13-14. But my picture used to stop there. God is the Judge; He forgives me; then He sends me away on my own and says, “Next case.”

But that’s *not* the full picture of our salvation. That’s not the picture painted by Paul in Colossians 1:21-22. In the biblical picture, Christ takes me from the courtroom by the hand and leads me into the Father’s house, walking me into God’s presence. When we enter the living room, the Father, my Father, is not in His judge’s robes. He’s in His family attire. When He sees me, it is just like Luke 15 and the prodigal son. My Father runs to me, throws His arms around me, and kisses me. He puts the family ring on my finger and ushers me back home!

That’s the amazing grace of reconciliation. But that’s still not the full picture of my salvation and it’s not the full picture of Colossians 1:22. Christ has cleansed me; He’s made me a new creation in Christ. I have a new nature with a new capacity to love God. In Christ I am a saint—holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation. That’s the amazing grace of regeneration.

Talk about addressing life’s ultimate questions! Talk about answering Nate’s question, “Can you help; is there any hope?” Ashley’s hope is that she has *already* been forgiven, welcomed home, and cleansed. Remember how Ashley described herself:

“I’m the good girl from the good home. The good mom; the good wife. But nobody knows the ugliness I feel inside. (Her ugliness has been cleansed by Christ!) Nobody knows how I’ve pretended and denied all these years. I just can’t keep faking it any longer. I’m a mess. Depressed to the point that at times I’ve thought about suicide. Always fearful and anxious—terrified I’ll displease someone (She is free from accusation in Christ!). Terrified someone will find out what an empty but evil thing I am…” (God already knows everything about her and in Christ He says, “Welcome home my forgiven, beloved, holy daughter!”)

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the ultimate life questions related to Redemption:

* **How does Christ bring us peace with God? How does Christ change people?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions and if you saw the core answer as: in Christ we are new creations and in Christ we are welcomed home by God?

**E. *C*hurch: Love Poised Between Faith and Hope**

One major *missing element* in the typical Creation/Fall/Redemption model is *the church*. But Paul does *not* omit the church. He does *not* move directly from Redemption to Consummation. Instead, he teaches that we find ourselves as the church living between two comings—the first and the second coming of Christ. We are poised between looking back with *faith* in our Redeemer and looking forward with *hope* as we await His return as Conquering Groom.

As Paul provides spiritual counsel for the troubled and confused Colossian Christians, he doesn’t envision them *alone*. Instead, he envisions them together in Colossians 3:12-16:

12“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

These words come right in the context of Colossians 3:9-10 where Paul talks about putting off the old ways and putting on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. This is the language of *progressive sanctification, of biblical counseling*. By linking progressive sanctification and one-another ministry in the Body of Christ Paul is teaching us that:

* **Sanctification is a Christ-centered community journey.**

Because sanctification is a community journey, we need to think through our answer to Nate’s question, “*Pastor Bob*, can *you* help?” Now, we don’t want to discourage Nate and Ashley. And we understand what he means—“Is there any help for Ashley?” But part of me would be thinking, “No, *I can’t help*. But *Christ and the Body of Christ can help!*”

I know this is odd for me to say as the Executive Director of the *Biblical Counseling* Coalition, but we need to get away from the idea that biblical counseling is *the* answer. We need to get away from the idea that an hour a week with a biblical counselor is all we need to find the help we’re looking for. It’s more than counseling; it’s a vision for the entire church.

That’s why, before the end of my first meeting with Nate and Ashley, I had already told Ashley about our church’s *Beauty for Ashes* group—a group of women led by two equipped and compassionate female leaders focusing on working through sexual abuse recovery *in a gospel-centered way in Christian community*. Ashley was not ready after the first meeting to join that group. So, I had her meet with one of the two leaders. Within three weeks Ashley became a member of our *Beauty for Ashes* group and it became a significant part of her healing and of her growth in grace.

This leads us to our summary of life’s next ultimate question:

* **Where do we find a place to believe, belong, and become?**

We need to ask the question, “What has the church to say and do that no other human institution can say and do?” We are the Jesus-centered, gospel-centered community that speaks gospel truth in love to one another so that we more deeply believe in Christ, belong to Christ and the Body of Christ, and become like Christ. No other institution can offer this.

Those of you who are my age may remember the TV show, *Cheers*. It’s the place “where everybody knows you name, and they’re always glad you came.’ It’s the place where everyone shouts, “Norm!” when Norm walks in. The local bar may try to be a place to belong, but it is not a place to become.

My Dad owned a paint store when I was growing up. Twenty yards to the right of the store was a bar. After a long day’s work, every evening, instead of coming home to his family, my Dad walked to that bar. Everybody knew his name, “Virg!” But no one ever said to my Dad, “Virg, what are you doing here? You have a wife and six kids at home who need you. Why are you hangin’ out with us?” The bar is *not* a place to become.

The church of Christ is *the* place to believe in Christ, to belong to Christ and the Body of Christ, and to become like Christ. Ashley and Nate don’t simply need our gospel-centered counseling; they need gospel-centered one-another ministry in the Body of Christ.

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the ultimate life question related to the church:

* **Where do we find a place to believe, belong, and become?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions and if you saw the core answer as: through gospel-centered one-another ministry in the Body of Christ?

**F. *C*onsummation: The War Is Won; The Bride Is Wed**

Paul began before the beginning and he ends after the end. Paul concurs that the Bible’s narrative presents life as “a war and a wedding,” and that we can capture the Bible’s theo-drama as “slay the dragon; marry the damsel.” In Colossians 1-2, Paul is teaching us that:

* **We need biblical imagination to see life today in light of Christ’ victory and the Bride’s purity!**

To people beaten down by sin and beaten up by suffering, Paul says in Colossians 1:13 and 2:14-15, and I paraphrase:

“Let me tell you the rest of the story—the end of the story. We were under Satan’s domain of utter darkness. Helpless and hopeless, Christ has rescued us. Just as earthly rulers transplant a conquered people from one country to another, so Christ has transplanted us from our earthly citizenship under Satan to our heavenly citizenship under Christ. But he transplants us not from liberty into slavery, but from slavery into liberty. He transplants us not out of darkness into semi-darkness, but out of dismal blindness into marvelous light. He’s disarmed His enemies and yours, triumphing over them by the cross” (my paraphrase of Colossians 1:13; 2:14-15).

Paul not only pulls back the curtain to show us the end of the war, he also shows us the beginning of the wedding.

“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:22).

This is almost identical to Paul’s wording in Ephesians 5:25-27 where his focus is on Christ’s love for the church providing the example for a husband’s love for his wife. This is wedding language!

Paul is letting us eavesdrop on eternity. Just like John does in Revelation 19:6-8.

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear” (Revelation 19:6-8).

The victory is announced. God reigns! The wedding march starts. All the scars and blemishes of sin are cleansed. The bride wears white!

Paul and John share the same message: *“The war is won! The bride is wed!”* Both messages communicate the same point: *the gospel is about God radically changing people*. The war Christ wins for us provides *victory* over sin and Satan. The wedding Christ prepares us for produces *purity* where there once was sin and shame. And it is all for God’s *glory*.

Nate asked if the Bible gives any hope for Ashley. Ashley has the sure hope of final victory and final purity. We then need to help Ashley to ponder, answer, and apply life’s next ultimate question:

* **How does our future destiny with Christ make a difference in our lives today as saints who struggle against suffering and sin?**

Christ’s triumph in the drama of redemption guides our interactions in our gospel-centered one-another ministry. We engage each other in gospel conversations encouraging one another to ponder:

“Why give up when we lose one battle, since we know we have won the war?” “Why choose mere survival, when we are more than conquerors?” “Why choose the cheap thrills of the pleasure of sin for a season when in the end we rule the universe forever dressed in pure white robes?”

With a partner, ponder the impact it could have on your counseling if you focused on the ultimate life question related to the Consummation:

* **How does our future destiny with Christ make a difference in our lives today as saints who struggle against suffering and sin?**

What difference could it make in how you counsel if you saw this as one of life’s ultimate questions and if you saw the answer as: we need biblical imagination to see life today in light of Christ’s victory/the Bride’s purity?

* **The** **CCFRCC and Sanctification (The Goal of Biblical Counseling)**

Let’s bring this all together now as we think through how this relates to Nate and Ashley, to Christian living, to biblical counseling, and to progressive sanctification? I’d summarize it like this:

* **We can only answer the progressive sanctification question (the goal of biblical counseling) *in light of* our answers to the preceding questions…**

Before we respond to Nate’s question about whether the Bible offers Ashley help and hope, we need to a gospel-centered model of biblical counseling that addresses life’s first seven ultimate questions:

* + (Foundational Question) *Word Question*: Where do we find wisdom for life in a broken world?
  + *Community/God*/*Trinity Question*: Whose view of God will we believe—Christ’s or Satan’s?
  + *Creation/Understanding People Question*: Whose are we?
  + *Fall/Problem Question*: What’s the root source of our problem?
  + *Redemption/Solution Question*: How does Christ change people? How does Christ bring us peace with God?
  + *Church/Body of Christ Question*: Where do we find a place to believe, belong, and become?
  + *Consummation/Future Question*: How does our future destiny with Christ make a difference in our lives today?

With gospel-centered answers to these questions, *then* we can ask life’s ultimate question about sanctification:

* **Sanctification: Why are we here? How do we become like Jesus? How can our inner life increasingly reflect the inner life of Christ?**

Our ultimate goal for Ashley may not be the same as Ashley and Nate’s immediate goal. Our definition of “help” and “hope” may be different from theirs. Their goal may be to change her circumstances and fix her feelings. While we would pray for those desires, we would want to help Nate and Ashley to focus on heart change—becoming more like Jesus—even if her situation and emotions do not change.

We can only help Nate and Ashley move toward that goal when our approach to counseling is gospel-centered. And gospel-centered counseling means we use all the acts in God’s Drama of Redemption to build our approach to biblical counseling.

**PDQs: Prompting Discussion Questions**

1. How can the grand redemptive narrative of the Bible (CCFRCC) impact your biblical counseling ministry? How could it shape your view of the Bible and your use of the Bible in counseling?
2. How would this big picture understanding of the movement of God’s Word shape how you moved into Ashley and Nate’s lives?

**Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Headed…**

* **Where We’ve Been: A Summary to Ponder…**
* To view the Bible confidently and to use the Bible competently we must understand the Bible’s story the way God tells it—as a gospel victory narrative.
  + **Where We’re Headed: Questions to Ponder…**
* How does our view of God’s Word impact our view of the world’s competing understandings of people, problems, and solutions?