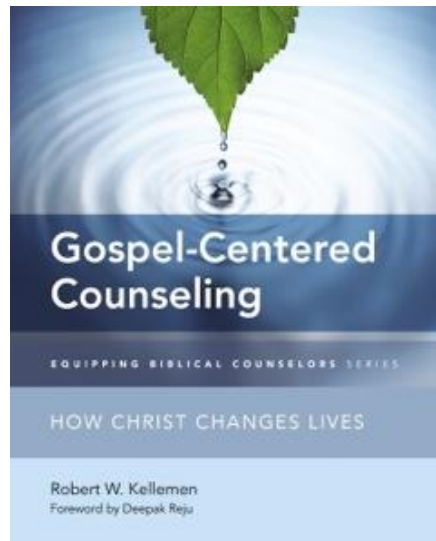


# ***Gospel-Centered Counseling***

***How Christ Changes Lives***



## ***Individual and Small Group Discussion Guide***

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## How to Use Your *Gospel-Centered Counseling Discussion Guide*

In medicine they tell doctors, “Physicians, heal thyself.” As soul physicians, it is not “Heal thyself,” but, “Go to the great Soul Physician for healing.” We can’t begin to practice gospel-centered counseling, or claim to care like Christ, if we are not going to Christ the Wonderful Counselor. That’s why this discussion guide has questions designed to encourage *personal application*. It is as we increasingly learn how to apply God’s Word richly and relevantly *to our lives* that we grow in the ability to help others apply God’s Word robustly to their lives.

And we do want to grow in helping others. That’s why this discussion guide also is designed to encourage *ministry application*. I want to help you to think through how you can make the information in *Gospel-Centered Counseling* relevant to transformational one-another ministry.

As I noted in the introduction to *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, Romans 15:14 provides an outline of components necessary to be a competent biblical counselor:

- Christlike Character: “Full of Goodness”
- Biblical Content: “Complete in Knowledge”
- Counseling Competence: “Competent to Counsel/Instruct”
- Christian Community: “Brothers/One Another”

This discussion guide seeks to bring all of these components together. If you are using this discussion guide in a small group setting, then the Christian community component can truly come alive. Here’s why: *we learn how to become effective biblical counselors by giving and receiving biblical counseling in community.*

Here’s what that could look like. Your group facilitator directs the group’s attention to a question, perhaps about Nate and Ashley from chapter one. The group starts interacting, and at first it is somewhat “surface.” But as you share a bit more, the group facilitator detects that one group member is responding much more personally. So the leader asks, “Becky, it seems like this question has stirred up some deep thoughts and feelings for you. Would it be okay if we kinda’ shifted from a more academic discussion to a more personal one? Would you like us to help you think through what’s going on for you and in you right now?”

That’s different, isn’t it, from how we sometimes work through a discussion guide? Just as the group facilitator in the vignette above *invited* Becky to “go deeper,” so I would invite your group to consider going deeper, going personal. Of course, that requires that your group develops trust—that your group is not just a “class studying biblical counseling,” but fellow members of the Body of Christ ministering to one-another as you speak and live the truth in love.

I know that can be scary. But remember, *we learn how to become effective biblical counselors by giving and receiving biblical counseling in community.* So, see your discussion guide as an opportunity to move from information to transformation—in your personal life and in your biblical counseling ministry to others.

## Introduction

### Changing Lives with Christ's Changeless Gospel Truth

1. As you assess your giftedness, personality, and skill-set, are you more on the truth side or more on the love side? More like the knowledgeable soul physician who might struggle with bedside manner, or more like the caring friend who wonders what to do after the hug?
  
2. As you read the "Keep Reading If..." section of the introduction, which example/illustration do you most resonate with? What is motivating you to start reading this book and to keep reading it?
  
3. Here's the purpose of this entire book in a tweet-size summary: *What would a model of biblical counseling and discipleship look like that was built solely upon Christ's gospel of grace?* What would your paragraph-size answer be?
  
4. Thinking about the "4Cs" of Character, Content, Competence, and Community, which do you think is your current strength as a biblical counselor? Which do you want the most equipping in so you can grow further as a biblical counselor?
  - Christlike *Character*: Full of Goodness—Spiritual Maturity (Being)
  - Biblical *Content*: Complete in Knowledge—Wisdom Applied to Life (Knowing)
  - Counseling *Competence*: Competent to Instruct—Christlike Ministry (Doing)
  - Christian *Community*: Brothers/One Another—Biblical Community (Loving)
  
5. Which of the Bible's eight ultimate life questions are you most excited about exploring? Why?
  - The Word: "Where do we find wisdom for life in a broken world?"
  - The Trinity/Community: "What comes into our mind when we think about God?" "Whose view of God will we believe—Christ's or Satan's?"
  - Creation: "Whose are we?" "In what story do we find ourselves?"
  - Fall: "What's the root source of our problem?" "What went wrong?"





- b. What are your beginning musings about the *Life Questions*? “What does it look like to live a whole life in a broken world? What is the purpose of life?”
    - c. What are your beginning musings about the *Counseling Questions*? “What is the ultimate focus of wise and loving counseling in a broken world—what does *help* look like? How can *gospel-centered* counselors minister to saints who are facing suffering and fighting besetting sins—what does *hope* look like?”
4. In our churches today, we tend to respond in one of three stereotypical ways when folks like Nate and Ashley approach us with real-life concerns. I labeled these the *refer*, *sprinkle*, or *concordance* approaches.
  - a. Which of these do you tend to see most churches use? Why do you think that is?
  - b. Which are *you* most tempted to use? Why do you think that is?
5. Imagine that you received the letter that “Brother Theophilus” sent the apostle Paul. If you were penning a response, what would you begin to write?
6. How would you respond to these “big picture” questions: 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?

7. You read in chapter 1 that, “We earn the right to bring God’s perspective to bear on our friends’ lives by first listening well to their life story.” How could this central concept impact your one-another ministry?
  
8. From the CCFRCC Narrative, what one principle in each “act” in the drama of redemption stands out to you as most important to your life and ministry?
  - *Community: Before the Beginning/Eternity Past*
  
  - *Creation: In the Beginning*
  
  - *Fall: The End of the Beginning*
  
  - *Redemption: Eternity Invades Time*
  
  - *Church: In the Fullness of Time*
  
  - *Consummation: After the End/Eternity Future*
  
9. Imagine that you are counseling Ashley. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 1. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 1 to your counseling of Ashley.

10. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 1: *To view the Bible accurately and use the Bible competently we must understand the Bible's story the way God tells it—as a gospel victory narrative.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 1?



## Chapter 2

### Discovering Wisdom for Life in a Broken World: Our Treasure Hunt for Wisdom

1. What are your *initial* responses to the questions raised at the beginning of chapter 2? What is the basis for your responses?
  - a. Is gospel-centered biblical counseling “Bible only” counseling that naïvely ignores resources that God has lovingly put at our disposal?
  - b. Does the use of any resource other than the Bible involve capitulation to the “wisdom of the world”?
  
2. A foundational premise in chapter 2 of *Gospel-Centered Counseling* is that *ancient philosophy and modern psychology cover the same terrain*. How might this historical information impact your interpretation and application of Colossians 2:4 and 2:8?
  
3. I summarize Paul in Colossians 2:1-9 as saying, “*Strangely, we seem prepared to learn how to live from almost anyone but Christ.*”
  - a. Where do we see that being true even in the church?
  - b. Where might this mindset even be creeping into your life?
  - c. How can we combat that mindset?
  
4. How would our churches, our small groups, and our one-another ministries change if we became communities of believers on a search-and-discovery mission, a treasure hunt, to find and uncover the greatest treasure ever—Christ who embodies wisdom, who *is* wisdom for life? How could you help launch that sort of community in your church?

5. As we consider where to find wisdom for life in a broken world, what difference does it make in our approach to “theory-building” if we truly believe that *Jesus knows people*?
  
6. In response to Colossians 2:1-8 and Colossians 4:2-6, take some time right now individually and/or as a group to pray for wisdom to share gospel conversations that are full of Christ’s grace so that you will wisdom for fellow believers *and* for unbelievers as they face life in a broken world.
  
7. What does this statement stir up in you? How does it motivate and encourage you as a biblical counselor?
  - “Paul says to the Colossians and to us, ‘When it comes to helping people deal with difficult life issues, don’t take a back seat to anyone!’”
  
8. Re-read the following working definition of biblical counseling. What do you like about the definition? What would you change, add, or delete? What is your working definition of biblical counseling?
  - Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed biblical counseling depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s Word to suffering and sin by speaking and living God’s truth in love to equip people to love God and one another (Matthew 22:35-40). It cultivates conformity to Christ (the whole person becoming whole in Christ—our inner life increasingly reflecting the inner life of Christ) and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ leading to a community of one-another disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20).

9. As a good “Berean,” you don’t just accept my answers to the questions in chapter 2. Having read this chapter and studied God’s Word, how do *you* answer the questions from chapter 2?
  - a. The questions about the complex mind/body connection. In response to Ashley’s depression and suicidal thoughts, would it be helpful if she saw a doctor? A psychiatrist? Could there be bio-chemical issues? Could medicine be an option?
  - b. The question related to descriptive research. In response to Ashley’s fear and anxiety, would it help if you were aware of the latest research on trauma and post-traumatic stress?
  - c. The questions related counseling theory and prescriptive therapy. In thinking through causes and cures, symptoms and prescriptions, would it be acceptable to blend your biblical worldview—the gospel narrative—with a secular worldview? Would it be wise to merge your biblical understanding of people, problems, and solutions with a secular psychology understanding of those issues?
10. Imagine that you are counseling Ashley. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 2. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 2 to your counseling of Ashley.
11. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 2: *The supremacy of Christ’s gospel, the sufficiency of Christ’s wisdom, and the superiority of Christ’s Church provide the wisdom we need for counseling in a broken world.* Now it’s your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 2?

### Chapter 3

## Knowing the Creator of the Soul: Our Great Soul Physician

1. A. W. Tozer reminds us that, “*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*” What comes into *your* mind when you think about God? Not what you would write on a theology quiz. Instead, what is your image of God deep in your heart in the midst of suffering or battling a besetting sin?
  
2. As David faced persecution, his one request was that he could “gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.” In our lives and ministries, how can we encourage one another to act on the belief that growing in our personal knowledge of and relationship to God is our most important calling and the most important thing about us?
  
3. Here is the central message of chapter 3: *We must know the Trinitarian Soul Physician personally to be a powerful soul physician.* How could this reality shape your preparation for growing as a competent biblical counselor?
  
4. Where would you have started your counseling with Steve, Alexis, and their children? Where would you have focused your biblical counseling? Why start there and focus there?
  
5. Every person who has ever lived, seeks to answer three vital identity questions:
  - What is my image of God?
  - What is my identity in Christ?
  - What do Christlike relationships with others look like?
  - a. How do you answer these questions? What shapes your answers? What difference does your answer make in how you live, relate, and minister?

- b. How could you use these three questions to shape your approach to people as a biblical counselor?
  
6. The human mind is a perpetual forge of idols *and* the human heart is a perpetual forge of false lovers—a sinful worshipping heart. Biblical counseling rightfully talks about “idols of the heart.” How would our biblical counseling become even more powerful if we also talked about “false lovers of the soul?”
  
7. You read in chapter 3, “Yes, we must get the gospel story right. However, we also must *trust the Story Author*. The gospel is not only a message to believe; it is a *Person to follow*. That Person is our Triune God.”
  - a. How could this statement impact you personally?
  
  - b. How could this statement impact you as a biblical counselor?
  
8. You also read in chapter 3, “*If we are going to learn spiritual friendship, then let’s look to the ultimate Spiritual Friend and the eternal Spiritual Friendship: the Trinity.*”
  - a. How could this statement impact you personally?
  
  - b. How could this statement impact you as a biblical counselor?



## Chapter 4

### Recognizing the Most Important Fact About Us: Our View of God

1. J.I. Packer has said, “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of *being God’s child, and having God as his Father*.<sup>1</sup> How much do you make of the thought of being God’s child and having God as your Father?
  
2. Matt Chandler explains that, “Often the question of ‘Who am I?’ should be answered with ‘Whose am I?’” He goes on to state, “The gospel provides the greatest identity one can ever find.”<sup>2</sup> How do you answer the question, “Whose am I?” How does the gospel provide your identity?
  
3. We all ask two central questions about God the Story Author:
  - “*God, do You care?*”—Questions about God’s love.
  - “*God, are You in control?*”—Questions about God’s holiness.
  - a. In the midst of suffering and besetting sin, how do you answer those two questions?
  
  - b. How could these two questions impact your ministry as a biblical counselor?
  
4. In our fallen world, there is a battle for our affection and attention, for our love and loyalty—a battle between whether we will believe Christ’s view of God or Satan’s view of God. How can this reality shape your biblical counseling?

5. How can the portrait of God's holiness (majesty and glory—our Hero) portrayed in Isaiah 40:10 impact your life? Your biblical counseling ministry?
  
6. How can the portrait of God's love (beauty and grace—our loving Husband and Father) portrayed in Isaiah 40:11 impact your life? Your biblical counseling ministry?
  
7. Emil Brunner explains that the cross of Christ "is the event in which God makes known his holiness and his love simultaneously, in one event, in an absolute manner." The cross "is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that his holiness and his love are equally infinite."<sup>3</sup>
  - a. How can the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross impact your life?
  
  - b. How can the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross impact your biblical counseling ministry?
  
8. As Shelly and Connie worked with Bethany, they focused on "horizontal work based upon vertical work." That is, before Bethany could rebuild her horizontal relationship with her earthly father, she had to rebuild her vertical relationship with her heavenly Father. How could you apply that principle in your biblical counseling, not just with parent-child relationships, but in all relationships?



9. The worst pain of suffering is not simply what happens *to* us, as horrific as that can be in our fallen world. The worst pain of suffering is what happens *in* us as we reflect on our suffering and as Satan tempts us to doubt God's good heart. How could you apply this truth to your life and ministry?
  
10. Imagine that you are counseling Bethany. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 4. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 4 to your counseling of Bethany.
  
11. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 4: *To know the God of peace and the peace of God we must know God in the fullness of His holy love demonstrated in the cross of Christ.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 4?

## Chapter 5

### Engaging the Battle for Our Soul: Our Spiritual Warfare in Spiritual Friendship

1. It is no accident that Paul directly follows his discussion of family living in Ephesians 5:18-6:9 with his discussion of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18.
  - a. How might it impact your family relationships if you connected the role of spiritual warfare to family living?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How might it impact your biblical marriage/family counseling if you connected the role of spiritual warfare to biblical marriage/family counseling?
  
2. You learned in chapter 5 that sin is like a malicious virus that relentlessly seeks to erase our memory of our trusting relationship with our trustworthy God. In what situations do you face the temptation to believe Satan's lie and to doubt God's good heart of holy love?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In examining Satan's temptation in Genesis 3, Michael Horton explains the temptation we each face: "*Do I define the Jesus story or does it define me?*"<sup>4</sup>
  - a. How would you paraphrase Horton's point?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How could you apply Horton's question to your life? To your ministry?

4. In the flesh we use every strategy at our disposal, every scheme we can imagine, to not need God's grace. Whenever we mistrust God's good heart, we always trust our own fallen hearts. What fig leaves do you sew to cover your shame? What view of God does such shame and hiding suggest?
5. First Satan tempts us to sin, and then he taunts us for having sinned. Satan presents the pleasure and profit of sin, but hides the misery that follows. How could these truths about Satan's schemes impact your biblical counseling ministry?
6. Shame that condemns wrongly convinces us that God has forever rejected us. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, is guilt that leads us to return to God. It is guilt that escorts us to grace. How could you apply these truths about Satan's lies in your one-another ministry, in your family relationships, and in your small groups?
7. Satan attempts to crop Christ out of the picture. As a biblical counselor and spiritual friend, how can you crop Christ and His holy love back into the picture with your counselees and spiritual friends?
8. Imagine that you are counseling Alexis and Steve. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 5. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 5 to your counseling of Alexis and Steve.
9. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 5: *Because Satan attempts to plant seeds of doubt about God's good heart, God calls us to crop the Christ of the cross back into the picture.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main "take-away" from chapter 5?

## Chapter 6

### Examining the Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul: Our View of People

1. In chapter 6, you found a three-fold approach to people-helping worded as:
  - “Is my *psychology* model—my understanding of people (Creation)—biblical?”
  - “Is my *psychopathology* model—my diagnosis of root causes/problems (Fall)—biblical?”
  - “Is my *psychotherapy* model—my approach to caring and prescribing cures (Redemption/Sanctification)—biblical?”
  - a. Do you agree or disagree that every counseling model addresses these categories? Why or why not?
  
  - b. Is it helpful or unhelpful for you to think of Creation, Fall, and Redemption/Sanctification in these categories? Why or why not?
  
2. What are the dangers of starting a counseling model based upon the Fall? What are the benefits of starting a counseling model based upon Creation?
  
3. Chapter 6 describes the end goal or target of biblical counseling as helping the *whole person to become a whole person in Christ*, and as *our inner life increasingly reflecting the inner life of Christ*. It states that our goal is not simply symptom relief, but Christlikeness. We are not solution-focused; we are *soul-ution-focused*.
  - a. How do these statements of the goal of biblical counseling compare to how you previously thought of your goal as a biblical counselor?
  
  - b. How would these statements impact how you do biblical counseling and how you view your counselees?

4. How does the model of human nature (of the heart) presented in Figure 6:1 and developed throughout chapters 6-7:
  - a. Compare to your previous understanding of how God designed the soul?
  - b. Impact your relating to the people you counsel?
  
5. In chapter 6, I asked you to stop and pray that the model presented in chapter 6 would not lead to a mechanical process of counseling, but rather encourage the sharing of Scripture and soul in soul-to-soul connection where you journey together with your counseling as you listen well and wisely to his/her story in light of God's grand gospel story. If you haven't stopped yet to pray, could you do so now—either individually or as a group?
  
6. Some models of counseling emphasize that we think, choose, and feel (rational, volitional, and emotional beings). Why do you think they leave out our relational core—our affections and longs and our capacity to relate to God, others, and self?
  
7. Pondering the comprehensive understanding of people created in God's image from chapter 6:
  - a. What would be missing in your understanding of people and in your counseling if any one of these aspects of the heart were minimized or omitted?
  - b. How would your counseling be impacted if your entire approach was based primarily on only one of these aspects of the human personality—for example, if you saw people as only or primarily emotional beings?

8. Imagine that you are counseling Mike (see chapter 7 also for a further description of Mike and his situation). If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 6. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 6 to your counseling of Mike.
  
9. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 6: *The whole, healthy, holy person's inner life increasingly reflects the inner life of Christ—relationally, rationally, volitionally, and emotionally*. Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 6?

## Chapter 7

### Journeying into the Heart: Our Role as Soul Physicians and Biblical Cardiologists

1. In chapter 7, I illustrate how my wrestling got worse (became mechanical) before it got better (became artful) as I learned to apply foundational principles to my wrestling. In what areas in your life have you gotten worse before you got better as you have gone through the learning curve of applying foundational principles? How might this apply to your development as a biblical counselor?
  
2. In chapter 7, you read a series of sample *heart probes*. As Mike's soul physician, how would you word each of the heart probe categories? What would your *theologically-guided questions* sound like as you journey with Mike?
  - LS: Exploring Mike's *Current* Life Situation as a Socially Embedded Being
  
  - LS: Exploring Mike's *Past* Life Situation
  
  - P: Exploring Mike's Life as a Physical Embodied Being
  
  - E: Exploring Mike's Life as an Emotional Being
  
  - V1: Exploring Mike's Life as a Volitional Being—Behavioral/Actions
  
  - V2: Exploring Mike's Life as a Volitional Being—Motivational/Goals
  
  - RT1: Exploring Mike's Life as a Rational Being—Beliefs

- RT2: Exploring Mike's Life as a Rational Being—Images
  - SA: Exploring Mike's Life as a Self-Aware Being
  - SO: Exploring Mike's Life as a Social Beings
  - SP: Exploring Mike's Life as a Spiritual Being
3. As you reflect on the dialogues as I journeyed in and entered Mike's troubling story (sustaining):
    - a. What surprises you about the interaction? Why?
    - b. What aspects of the interaction would you want to add to how you relate to people in their troubling story?
    - c. If you're responding individually, write out a summary of what your sustaining dialogue would sound like. If you're responding in a group setting, role play your sustaining dialogue with Mike as you enter his troubling story.
  4. As you reflect on the dialogues as I journeyed out and entered Mike's faith story (healing):
    - a. What surprises you about the interaction? Why?



- b. What aspects of the interaction would you want to add to how you relate to people in their faith story?
  - c. If you're responding individually, write out a summary of what your healing triologue would sound like. If you're responding in a group setting, role play your healing triologue with Mike as you enter his faith story.
  
5. As you reflect on the dialogues as I journeyed in and entered Christ's *redemptive* story with Mike (reconciling):
  - a. What surprises you about the interaction? Why?
  
  - b. What aspects of the interaction would you want to add to how you relate to people in their faith story?
  
  - c. If you're responding individually, write out a summary of what your reconciling triologue would sound like. If you're responding in a group setting, role play your reconciling triologue with Mike as the two of you enter Christ's redemptive story.
  
6. As you reflect on the dialogues as I journeyed in and entered Mike's *growth-in-grace* story (guiding):
  - a. What surprises you about the interaction? Why?

- b. What aspects of the interaction would you want to add to how you relate to people in their faith story?
  
  - c. If you're responding individually, write out a summary of what your guiding triologue would sound like. If you're responding in a group setting, role play your guiding triologue with Mike as you enter his growth-in-grace story.
7. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 7: *Biblical counselors pursue compassionate and wise counseling where our love abounds in depth of knowledge about the heart in the world.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 7?

## Chapter 8

### Exploring Serpentine Seduction to Sin: Our Spiritual Adultery

1. What is missing in our biblical counseling approach to people if we skip the tragic message of the Fall?
  
2. Satan's first temptation focuses on *seducing us to doubt God's good heart*.
  - a. Where and when do you find yourself having to fight this temptation? How do you overcome this temptation through the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God?
  
  - b. How could awareness of Satan's seduction impact your biblical counseling ministry?
  
3. Satan's next temptation focuses on *seducing us to love anyone or anything more than God*.
  - a. Where and when do you find yourself having to fight this temptation? How do you overcome this temptation through the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God?
  
  - b. How could awareness of Satan's seduction impact your biblical counseling ministry?

4. Thinking about your affections and a current besetting sin or a past time of surrender to temptation, prayerfully ponder and apply to your life the following heart probes:
  - a. At the moment of temptation, what do I believe is most satisfying—God or this sin? Why? In what ways?
  - b. What thirst, hunger, affection, delight, appetite, or desire am I attempting to satisfy?
  - c. In what ways does God satisfy the legitimate aspects of this affection?
  - d. What am I hoping for when I give into this sin?
  - e. What does Scripture say about this longing?
  
5. Thinking about your imagination/images and a current besetting sin or a past time of surrender to temptation, prayerfully ponder and apply to your life the following heart probes:
  - a. What controlling false images of God cloud my thinking when I'm struggling against this sin? What lowly views of God capture my attention?
  - b. How is Satan cropping God out of the picture? How is Satan cropping in false images of deceptive beauty and seductive temptation?
  - c. As I face this sin, what faulty, but seductive, views of relational reality fill my mind?

- d. As I face this sin, what compelling sinful images captivate my soul while capturing my mind?
6. Thinking about your perceptions/beliefs/mindsets and a current besetting sin or a past time of surrender to temptation, prayerfully ponder and apply to your life the following heart probes:
- a. As I give into this sin, where am I pushing down evidence of God's goodness?
  - b. How am I belittling God's holy love when I surrender to this sin?
  - c. In association with this sin, where am I believing that God is a Hoarder?
  - d. What truths about God could deliver me from this temptation?
  - e. What lies am I believing that push those truths about God out of my mind?
7. Thinking about your volition/choices/motivations and a current besetting sin or a past time of surrender to temptation, prayerfully ponder and apply to your life the following heart probes:
- a. What cisterns am I digging to quench my relational thirsts when I cave into this sin?
  - b. What themes or patterns do I detect in these times when I am choosing this sin over Jesus?
  - c. How do I consistently, but subtly, attempt to quench my thirsts in ways that God disapproves of?

- d. Relative to this sin, what do I do to get (demand) what I want?
8. Thinking about your emotions/feelings/moods and a current besetting sin or a past time of surrender to temptation, prayerfully ponder and apply to your life the following heart probes:
    - a. Regarding this sin, how am I living to satisfy my immediate pleasure?
    - b. Regarding this sin, where have I surrendered to my feelings?
    - c. Relative to this sin, how have I become addicted to pursuing positive feelings or to avoiding negative feelings?
    - d. When I give into this sin, what momentary pleasures do I experience? What lasting shame do I experience?
  9. As you reflect on your responses to questions 4-8, please don't stop at sin. Turn, no, run to Christ for grace. Apply the words of Michael Vincent: "On my worst days of sin and failure, the gospel encourages me with God's unrelenting grace toward me."<sup>5</sup>
  10. I offered the following two tweet-size summaries of chapter 8: *The essence of sin is spiritual adultery—choosing to love anyone or anything more than God. Sin is not just a thief caught in a crime; sin is an adulterer caught in the act.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main "take-away" from chapter 8?

## **Chapter 9**

### **Diagnosing the Fallen Condition of the Soul: Our Fallen Heart**

1. Compare and contrast how a “soul pharmacist” would provide biblical counseling and how a “soul physician” would provide biblical counseling.
  
2. Reflecting on the “Gown of Justification”:
  - a. What does it look like in your life to take your sinful self-sufficiency to Christ and to choose to stand stark naked before God without a shred of self-righteous clothing while you cling to Christ’s righteousness?
  
  - b. What does it look like in your biblical counseling to encourage people to take their sinful self-sufficiency to Christ and to choose to stand stark naked before God without a shred of self-righteous clothing while they cling to Christ’s righteousness?
  
3. Reflecting on the “Gown of Reconciliation,” how do you help believers to see that Christ has already unlocked the door home?
  
4. Reflecting on the “Gown of Regeneration,” how do you help believers to live like the renewed person they already are in Christ in their desires, thoughts, choices, and feelings?
  
5. Reflecting on the “Gown of Redemption,” how do you help believers to quit buying the lie that sin in them is more powerful than Christ in them?

6. Imagine that you are counseling Ray. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 9. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 9 to your counseling of Ray.
  
7. Imagine that you are counseling the Prodigal son and the Pharisaical son. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 9. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 9 to your counseling of the Prodigal son and the Pharisaical son.
  
8. I offered the following two tweet-size summaries of chapter 9: *Apart from Christ we're condemned as adulterous spouses, dead in sin, separated from the life of God with depraved heart capacities enslaved to sin. And: Sin is what personal beings imagine, think, choose, do, and feel as they desire and love anything or anyone more than Christ.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 9?



## Chapter 10

### Applying the Gospel to Suffering: Our Gospel-Centered Self Counsel

1. As competent gospel-centered biblical counselors who want to help others to apply the gospel to their *suffering* we need to ask ourselves from our hearts:
  - a. Am I brutally honest with Christ and Christians about my suffering?
  - b. Am I climbing in the casket with my hurting friends?
  - c. Do I acknowledge my need for *the* Soul Physician?
  - d. Do I acknowledge my need for *a* soul physician/spiritual friend—the Body of Christ?
  - e. Am I trusting in the God-who-continually-raises-the-dead?
  - f. Do I cling to Christ to experience mini-resurrections every day from my mini-casket experiences?
  - g. Am I jointly supporting others by pointing them to Christ?
  
2. As competent gospel-centered biblical counselors who want to help others to apply the gospel to their *suffering*, what would it look like for you to incorporate the following principles into your counseling ministry:
  - a. Encouraging counselees to be brutally honest with Christ and Christians about my suffering?

- b. Climbing in the casket with your counselees?
  - c. Encouraging your counselees to acknowledge their need for *the* Soul Physician?
  - d. Encouraging your counselees to acknowledge their need for *a* soul physician/spiritual friend—the Body of Christ?
  - e. Encouraging your counselees to trust in the God-who-continually-raises-the-dead?
  - f. Encouraging your counselees to cling to Christ to experience mini-resurrections every day from my mini-casket experiences?
  - g. Encouraging your counselees to jointly support others by pointing them to Christ?
3. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 10: *Fully biblical gospel-centered counseling deals thoroughly both with the sins we have committed and with the evils we have suffered.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 10?

## Chapter 11

### Prescribing God's Cure for the Soul: Part 1—Our New Nurture

1. There are two ways to ask the questions related to Redemption and biblical counseling. The first is, "How do we find peace with God?" and "How do people change?" The second is: "How does *Christ bring us peace* with God?" and "How does *Christ change people*?" What difference does how we ask these questions make in how we apply salvation to our biblical counseling ministry?
  
2. How could you apply each of the truths about our complete salvation to your life and to your biblical counseling ministry?
  - a. Justification: Our New Pardon—The Judge Declares Us, "Not Guilty! Forgiven!"
  
  - b. Reconciliation: Our New Peace—The Father Says to Us, "Welcome Home!"
  
  - c. Regeneration: Our New Person—The Creator Says to Us, "You're a New Creation in Christ! Saints!"
  
  - d. Redemption: Our New Power—The Victor Says to Us, "You Are More Than a Conquerors through Christ! Victors!"
  
3. What difference would it make in your life if you saw yourself in Christ, every second, as a forgiven son/daughter, saint, and victor? What difference could it make in your ministry if you whispered or shouted these words to your counsees: "Forgiven! Welcomed home! New creation! Free!"

4. I've taken an entire book to answer this question: "*What would a model of one-another ministry look like that was built solely on Christ's gospel of grace applied to Christians—justified, reconciled, regenerated, and redeemed people?*" What would your paragraph summary answer look like?
  
5. *As bad as our trials are, the worst trial is our trial of faith*—the temptation to give up on Christ and to give in to sin. Trials and temptations bring us to a *faith point*. When you come to that faith point, what keeps you clinging to Christ rather than flinging away your trust in Christ? What keeps you turning toward and running to Christ rather than losing your confidence in Christ?
  
6. Based upon Hebrews 10:19, we know that in Christ God is saying, "Come near and party!" We know that because of Christ we can look God in the eyes. Kim penned a prayer of accepting her acceptance in Christ. What would your prayer sound like?
  
7. Based upon Hebrews 10:19-20, we know that Christ has opened the way home. Kim penned a prayer of homecoming based upon these verses. What would your prayer of homecoming sound like?
  
8. *Gospel conversations* about faith, hope, and love (Hebrews 10:21-25) *are impossible without gospel grace* (Hebrews 10:19-20). As a biblical counselor, how can you engage in gospel conversations with people about faith, hope, and love based upon Hebrews 10:19-25?
  
9. Imagine that you are counseling Kim. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 11. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 11 to your counseling of Kim.

10. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 11: *We must build our biblical counseling models of change on Christ's gospel applied to Christians—justified, reconciled, regenerated, and redeemed people.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 11?

## Chapter 12

### Prescribing God's Cure for the Soul: Part 2—Our New Nature

1. Chapter 12 highlights our new *nature*—regeneration and redemption.
  - a. How would the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) situation have been different if Jesus offered her new *nurture*—justification and reconciliation, but omitted new *nature*—regeneration and redemption?
  - b. How would my biblical counseling of Kim have been different if Shontal and I counseled her based upon justification and reconciliation, but omitted regeneration and redemption?
2. Why do you think “gospel amnesia” was so common in Peter’s day and is so common today? What can we do to encourage one another to live and counsel based upon new covenant realities?
3. Satan seeks to capture our imagination with the lie that while we *may* be forgiven by grace (new nurture); we certainly are *not* changed by grace (new nature). He crops regeneration and redemption out of the picture. As a biblical counselor, how can you crop Christ’s regeneration and redemption back into every pixel of the picture?
4. How could you apply these concepts about our new heart to your ministry as a biblical counselor?
  - a. Renewed Heart Chamber # 1: Relational—From Spiritual Adulterers to Virgin Brides

- b. Renewed Heart Chamber # 2: Rational—From Heart Idolaters to Grace Narrators
  
  - c. Renewed Heart Chamber # 3: Volitional—From Enslaved Destroyers to Empowering Shepherds
  
  - d. Renewed Heart Chamber # 4: Emotional—From Ungoverned Users to Soulful Psalmists
5. In your biblical counseling ministry, how could you use these two questions about our redemption in Christ?
- a. In the moment of temptation, what difference could it make for you to see yourself co-crucified with Christ to the power of sin?
  
  - b. In the moment of temptation, what difference could it make for you to see yourself co-resurrected with Christ so that the same power that raised Him from the dead is in you and available to you to defeat sin?
6. Imagine that you are counseling Kim. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you would do based upon the principles in chapter 12. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where you apply principles from chapter 12 to your counseling of Kim.

7. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 12: *Through regeneration our new heart has a new want to; through redemption our new heart has a new can do.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 12?



## Chapter 13

### Finding a Place to Belong and Become: Our Growth in Grace Is a Community Journey

1. The world is trying to replicate what we have, so why in the world are we trying so hard to replicate the world? Why in the world are we sending our people to the world's empty counterfeit replica of the church?
  
2. It is the rare book that provides a biblical, practical, relational strategy for *uniting* gospel-centered ministry, biblical counseling, sanctification, *and* the local church. Why do we tend to write about and think about these biblical concepts as four separate topics rather than *one united focus*?
  
3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement and why or why not?  
“Everything you’ve ever read in any book about gospel-centered ministry, biblical counseling, sanctification, and the local church is impossible to grasp and apply unless you do so *together with all the saints*.”
  
4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement and why or why not?  
“Christ’s grand plan for His church is for pastors/teachers to focus on equipping every member to do the work of the ministry.”
  
5. How would church ministry change if the following eight words were every church leader’s reason for existence? “*To prepare God’s people for works of service*.”
  
6. How would church ministry change if the following mission guided our ministry?  
“*Christ’s grand plan for His church is for every member to be a disciple-maker by speaking and living gospel truth to one another in love*.”

7. How can our churches catch and cast:
  - a. A Unified Vision of the Pulpit Ministry of the Word and the Personal Ministry of the Word?
  - b. A Unified Vision of One-Another Ministry?
  - c. A Unified Vision of the Church and the Community?
  
8. Imagine that Lisa and Dan are in your church. They have suffered a deep loss and are grieving mightily. How could a church *of* biblical counseling come around Lisa and Dan in a way that united gospel-centered ministry, biblical counseling, sanctification, *and* the local church?
  
9. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 13: *Together with all the saints the church becomes **the** place to belong to Christ and the Body of Christ and become like Christ because sanctification is a community journey.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 13?

## Chapter 14

### Remembering the Future: Our Eternal Perspective

1. How can knowing the end of God's grand redemptive story guide every chapter of our life story today?
2. How can Christ's triumph in the drama of redemption guide our every interaction in our one-another ministry?
3. The first duty of a biblical counselor is to define reality—past, present, and future.
  - a. How could you help counselees to define future reality biblically?
  - b. How could cropping the future back into the picture become a more pervasive aspect of your biblical counseling ministry?
4. In Revelation, John paints the big picture of our future hope. *Jesus slays the dragon* (Revelation 19:17-21 and the great supper of God) *and weds the damsel* (Revelation 19:6-11 and the wedding supper of the Lamb).
  - a. How can we fill our imaginations with images of our future wedding and the final war?
  - b. How can our future wedding and the final war impact how we handle suffering and fight sin today?

5. Take a moment now to move away from the academics lessons of this chapter, and stop, pray, ponder, and apply *to your life*, the following biblical portraits.
  - a. In your suffering that feels like it has drained out every last drop of life, picture Jesus face-to-face with *you* inviting *you* to come to *Him* and to thirst no more. Picture Jesus, His hand the hand that tenderly wipes away every last tear from your eye.
  - b. In your weariness of battling yet again that unrelenting besetting sin, picture Jesus smiling as He sees *you* walking down the aisle dressed in His righteousness—never ever to struggle with sin again.
  - c. In your loneliness, picture Jesus welcoming *you* home to your forever home with your forever family and saying “I will be your God and you will be my son.”
  - d. In your sense of purposelessness or lack of meaning, picture Jesus with His arms open wide to the full expanse of the new heaven and the new earth, saying, “You’ve inherited all of this. Rule over it. Shepherd it. Enjoy it!”
6. Perpetua and her friends are real-life models of *remembering the future*. What personal life application and biblical counseling ministry implications do you derive from their model?
7. How could the following principle shape your biblical counseling? “Biblical counselors listen well and empathize with the earthly story of suffering and hurt. In so doing, we earn the right then to encourage our spiritual friends to listen well to God’s eternal story of hope.”

8. Ponder an area of suffering in your life and/or an area of struggle against sin. Imagine that Perpetua, Felicitas, and their friends were your biblical counselors. If you are responding to this question individually, craft a dialogue/trialogue of some of the counseling you think they would offer you. If you are responding to this question in a group setting, create a role play scenario where Perpetua, Felicitas, and their friends counsel one of you.
  
9. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 14: *As saints who struggle with suffering and sin, we must crop back into the picture our future purity (the wedding) and future victory (the final war)*. Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 14?

## Chapter 15

### Dispensing Grace: Our Gospel-Centered Growth in Grace

1. Why do we often divorce sanctification from the rest of our Bible—from theology? How can we build our approach to progressive sanctification on a comprehensive biblical theology?
  
2. I described counseling as: spaghetti relationships—a swirled-together, messy journey as we minister to hurting people. To what extent has this been your experience as a people-helper? In this messy journey, how does God’s Word provide a compass, but not a strait-jacket?
  
3. Here’s the central question that chapter 15 explores: “Is sanctification all of God, all of us, or does sanctification in some way involve God *and* the believer?” What would your paragraph-length answer be to this question?
  
4. How would you assess the quote, “Sanctification is the art of getting used to our justification”? What are strengths and weaknesses of this view of sanctification?
  
5. How would you assess the quote, “Sanctification is the active process of putting off and putting on”? What are strengths and weaknesses of this view of sanctification?
  
6. Re-read my comprehensive (5-tweet-size) definition of sanctification.
  - Sanctification is the grace-motivated and grace-empowered art of applying our justification, reconciliation, regeneration, and redemption to our daily lives and relationships through wisdom from the Word of God, through relational dependence upon our Triune God, through the encouragement of the people of God, and through the motivation from our future with God so that our inner life increasingly reflects the inner life of Christ (relationally,



9. Imagine that you are counseling Kim (from chapters 11-12). Since biblical counseling is only one (important) aspect of growth in grace, develop a plan—specific for Kim—for how Kim could apply the spiritual disciplines/spiritual formation categories from Figure 15:1 to her life.
  
10. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 15: *Sanctification is the art of applying our complete salvation by God's grace, Spirit, Word, people, and future hope so we increasingly reflect Christ.* Now it's your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 15?



**Chapter 16**  
**Putting Off and Putting On:**  
**God's Heart Change Model of Progressive Sanctification**

1. Before reading this chapter, or even this book, how would you have answered these questions? What does heart change look like? What does Christlikeness look like? What is it that we are to put off and put on?
  
2. Thinking through an area of suffering and/or an area of besetting sin, work through the heart change model of progressive sanctification in your life.
  - a. Journey Marker 1: Rational Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Foolish Mindsets: “I Repent of the Insane Idols of My Heart”
  
  - b. Journey Marker 2: Relational/Spiritual Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Disordered Spiritual Affections: “I Divorce the Adulterous False Lovers of My Soul”
  
  - c. Journey Marker 3: Relational/Self-Aware Mortification—Putting Off Our Disordered Old Self-Aware Affections: “I Reject the Ugliness of My Self-Beautification”
  
  - d. Journey Marker 4: Relational/Social Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Disordered Social Affections: “I Uproot My Self-Centered Using of Others”
  
  - e. Journey Marker 5: Volitional Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Self-Centered Purposes/Pathways: “I Put to Death My Enslaved Destructive Self-Gratification”

- f. Journey Marker 6: Emotional Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Ungoverned Mood States—“I Crucify My Addictive Passions”
  - g. Journey Marker 7: Rational Vivification—Putting On Our New Wise Mindsets: “I Renew My Mind by Being Transformed by the Truth of Christ’s Grace Narrative”
  - h. Journey Marker 8: Relational Spiritual Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Spiritual Affections: “I Enjoy and Exalt God My Spring of Living Water”
  - i. Journey Marker 9: Relational Self-Aware Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Self-Aware Affections: “I Reckon on the Truth of Who I Am to and in Christ”
  - j. Journey Marker 10: Relational Social Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Social Affections: “I Nourish My New Shepherding Love for Others”
  - k. Journey Marker 11: Volitional Vivification—Putting On Our New Other-Centered Purposes/Pathways: “I Fan into Flame My New Freed Will Empowered to Empower Others”
  - l. Journey Marker 12: Emotional Vivification—Putting On Our New Managed Mood States: “I Soothe My Soul in My Savior”
3. Thinking through an area of suffering and/or an area of besetting sin, work through the heart change model of progressive sanctification with a counselee in mind.
- a. Journey Marker 1: Rational Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Foolish Mindsets: “I Repent of the Insane Idols of My Heart”

- b. Journey Marker 2: Relational/Spiritual Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Disordered Spiritual Affections: “I Divorce the Adulterous False Lovers of My Soul”
- c. Journey Marker 3: Relational/Self-Aware Mortification—Putting Off Our Disordered Old Self-Aware Affections: “I Reject the Ugliness of My Self-Beautification”
- d. Journey Marker 4: Relational/Social Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Disordered Social Affections: “I Uproot My Self-Centered Using of Others”
- e. Journey Marker 5: Volitional Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Self-Centered Purposes/Pathways: “I Put to Death My Enslaved Destructive Self-Gratification”
- f. Journey Marker 6: Emotional Mortification—Putting Off Our Old Ungoverned Mood States—“I Crucify My Addictive Passions”
- g. Journey Marker 7: Rational Vivification—Putting On Our New Wise Mindsets: “I Renew My Mind by Being Transformed by the Truth of Christ’s Grace Narrative”
- h. Journey Marker 8: Relational Spiritual Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Spiritual Affections: “I Enjoy and Exalt God My Spring of Living Water”
- i. Journey Marker 9: Relational Self-Aware Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Self-Aware Affections: “I Reckon on the Truth of Who I Am to and in Christ”

- j. Journey Marker 10: Relational Social Vivification—Putting On Our New Purified Social Affections: “I Nourish My New Shepherding Love for Others”
  - k. Journey Marker 11: Volitional Vivification—Putting On Our New Other-Centered Purposes/Pathways: “I Fan into Flame My New Freed Will Empowered to Empower Others”
  - l. Journey Marker 12: Emotional Vivification—Putting On Our New Managed Mood States: “I Soothe My Soul in My Savior”
4. I offered the following tweet-size summary of chapter 16: *Gospel-motivated/empowered heart change puts off/puts on affections, mindsets, purposes, and mood states so we increasingly reflect the heart of Christ*. Now it’s your turn—what is your tweet-size summary of your main “take-away” from chapter 16?

## **Conclusion**

### **Living Life Empowered by Christ's Changeless Gospel Truth**

1. I summarized Paul's message in Colossians and the message of *Gospel-Centered Counseling* as: *Live life today in light of Christ's gospel victory narrative*. What is your tweet-size summary of *Gospel-Centered Counseling*?
  
2. What are two or three main personal life applications from *Gospel-Centered Counseling*?
  
3. What are two or three main biblical counseling ministry applications from *Gospel-Centered Counseling*?
  
4. In the conclusion, I collated every chapter tweet summary.
  - a. Which chapter/tweet summary most impacts your personal life? How?
  
  - b. Which chapter/tweet summary most impacts your counseling ministry? How?
  
5. In the second volume in this series on equipping biblical counselors—*Gospel Conversations*—I focus on “how to care like Christ.” From the theological foundation of *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, we move to the relational ministry of speaking the truth in love.
  - a. In your ministry to people, where are you stronger: truth/theology or love/relationship?



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 201-202, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup>Matt Chandler, *Creature of the Word* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 154, 155.

<sup>3</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Westminster, 1947), 450, 470.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>5</sup>Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2008), 20.