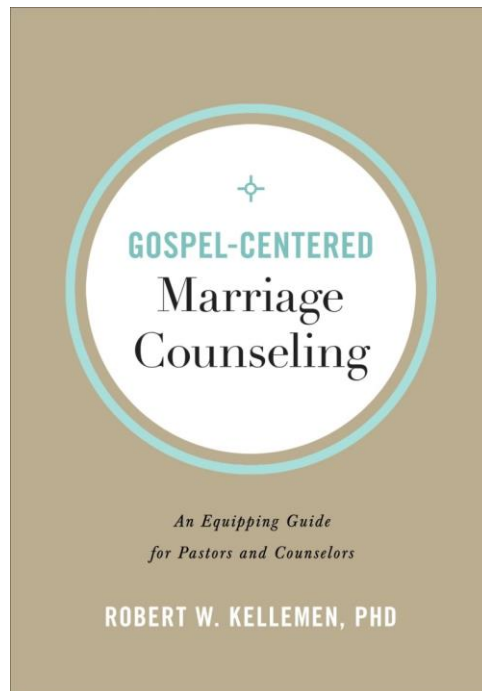


An Excerpt from Chapter 4 of:

Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling

An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors



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Baker

Chapter 4

Mapping Biblical Marriage Counseling: Our Marriage Counseling GPS

Introduction: Theology Matters

As we launch our focus on the *methodology* of biblical marriage counseling, we should remind ourselves why we first spent three chapters on the *theology* of marriage counseling. Every counseling approach is based upon some theory, some worldview.

Over two decades ago in my Ph.D. program at Kent State University (KSU), three marriage counseling approaches were prominent: family systems, narrative therapy, and solution-focused therapy. As we learned each approach, every class spent up to half the time on the theory and worldview behind the model.

While professors at KSU would not have called their theory a “theology,” they covered theological terrain. Each model explored the same three areas we explored in chapters 1-3:

- *Understanding People*: A theory of couples—understanding how couples are to function and relate in healthy ways. Because we are exploring a *biblical* approach to marriage counseling, we call this “Creation”: understanding God’s design for healthy marriage relationships.
- *Diagnosing Problems*: A theory of why couples struggle—diagnosing what is wrong either inside each spouse and/or between spouses. Because we are exploring a *biblical* approach to marriage counseling, we call this “Fall”: understanding how our heart sin leads to relational sinning.
- *Prescribing Solutions*: A theory of how to help couples—prescribing how to move from unhealthy to mutually healthy relationships. Because we are exploring a *biblical* approach to marriage counseling, we call this “Redemption”: understanding how Christ changes us and how we relate.

Theology matters in our ten chapters on methodology. In this chapter, we outline how a biblical Creation-Fall-Redemption theology of marriage shapes three areas of marriage counseling:

- *Our Focus*: Encouraging couples to couple through gospel connection.
- *Our Role*: Envisioning ourselves as collaborators (co-laborers) through gospel coaching.
- *Our Approach*: Equipping couples to care for each other through gospel conversations.

We can consider these our GPS: *Gospel Positioning Scripture*. The gospel matters eternally and it matters daily. The gospel matters in marriage and marriage counseling. Let’s see how...

Maturing as a Biblical Marriage Counselor: Theology Matters

1. Think back to the “Creation” theology of chapter 1 (perhaps do a quick review of chapter 1). What are some of the top 2 or 3 implications for marriage counseling from chapter 1?
 - a. Marriage Counseling Implication #1:
 - b. Marriage Counseling Implication #2:
 - c. Marriage Counseling Implication #3:
2. Think back to the “Fall” theology of chapter 2 (perhaps do a quick review of chapter 2). What are some of the top 2 or 3 implications for marriage counseling from chapter 2?
 - a. Marriage Counseling Implication #1:
 - b. Marriage Counseling Implication #2:
 - c. Marriage Counseling Implication #3:
3. Think back to the “Redemption” theology of chapter 3 (perhaps do a quick review of chapter 3). What are some of the top 2 or 3 implications for marriage counseling from chapter 3?
 - a. Marriage Counseling Implication #1:
 - b. Marriage Counseling Implication #2:
 - c. Marriage Counseling Implication #3:

Our Focus: Encouraging Couples to Couple Through Gospel Connection

God calls *couples to couple*. “‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:23-25).

If we are not careful as marriage counselors, we can displace the husband and wife as the primary instruments for comfort, encouragement, restoration, and wisdom. Yes, as counselors, we must connect deeply with both spouses. However, the hurting husband and wife, having left their parents as their primary connection, should not primarily attach to their marriage counselor.

Attaching to the counselor is a temptation for them—because they are so hungry for connection. It can also be a temptation for us as their counselor. If we are not maturing in Christ, we will *need* them to attach to us. It fills us up; makes us feel necessary and useful. Instead of being their marriage counselor, we become their marriage *Messiah*. And there is only One Messiah—and it is *not* us.

In chapter 6, you will learn several marriage counseling competencies to connect with the couple *so that* they connect with each other. I am raising the issue now as a foundational mindset shift for us as marriage counselors. Our mindset is not, “How can I rescue their marriage?” Instead, our mindset is, “How can I encourage this couple to connect to each other, to Christ, and to the body of Christ so their marriage glorifies Christ?”

If our theology of marriage from Genesis 2, Genesis 3, Ephesians 1-6, Colossians 3, Matthew 7, James 4, and 1 Peter 3 means anything, it means that the counselor is not the most important person in their marriage—Christ is and they are. So, before, during, and after every marriage counseling session, we are asking marriage counselor questions like:

- “How can I help this couple find their gospel comfort in Christ so they can comfort each other (2 Cor. 1:3-8)?”
- “How can I help this couple find their gospel encouragement in Christ so they can encourage each other (2 Cor. 1:8-11; Phil. 2:1-5)?”
- “How can I help this couple find their gospel restoration in Christ so they can forgive each other, reconcile with each other, and have their marriage restored in Christ (Eph. 4:30-5:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21)?”
- “How can I help this couple discover and apply gospel wisdom from Christ and his Word so they can discern together what is best and pure and glorifying to Christ (Phil. 1:9-11)?”
- “How can I help this couple cleave together to Christ so they can experience gospel leaving, cleaving, weaving, and receiving (Genesis 2:23-25)?”
- “How can I stir up this couple to tap into the gospel resources residing in them so their marriage can bear the fruit of the Spirit’s power, love, and wisdom (2 Timothy 1:6-7)?”

Maturing as a Biblical Marriage Counselor
Our Focus: Encouraging Couples to Couple Through Gospel Connection

1. You read that if we are not careful as marriage counselors we can displace the husband and wife as the primary instrument for comfort, encouragement, restoration, and wisdom.
 - a. Have you ever seen this happen in marriage counseling—either that you observed, received, or offered? If so, what was the impact?
 - b. How can marriage counselors avoid this pitfall of displacing the couple?
2. You read, “Instead of being their marriage counselor, we become their marriage *Messiah*.”
 - a. Have you ever seen this happen in marriage counseling—either that you observed, received, or offered? If so, what was the impact?
 - b. How can marriage counselors avoid this sin of displacing Christ?
3. Which of the marriage counselor mindset questions seems most important to your ministry as a marriage counselor? Why? How could you apply these mindsets to your ministry?
 - a. “How can I help this couple find their gospel comfort in Christ so they can comfort each other?”
 - b. “How can I help this couple find their gospel encouragement in Christ so they can encourage each other?”
 - c. “How can I help this couple find their gospel restoration in Christ so they can forgive each other, reconcile with each other, and have their marriage restored in Christ?”
 - d. “How can I help this couple discover and apply gospel wisdom from Christ and his Word so they can discern together what is best and pure and glorifying to Christ?”
 - e. “How can I help this couple cleave together to Christ so they can experience gospel leaving, cleaving, weaving, and receiving?”
 - f. “How can I stir up this couple to tap into the gospel resources residing in them so their marriage can bear the fruit of the Spirit’s power, love, and wisdom (2 Timothy 1:6-7)?”

Our Role: Envisioning Ourselves as Collaborators Through Gospel Coaching

Since we are *not* marriage Messiahs, then what *are* we? What images capture our calling as biblical marriage counselors who seek to encourage couples to couple? Future chapters will provide training in specific skills related to these images. Right now our focus is on envisioning the roles we need to take on in order to be an effective marriage counselor.

A Gospel Coach

Coaches do not play the game for their players. They empower their players to play powerfully. So it is with marriage ministers—through Christ’s power we empower couples to love with the uniqueness God designed into them. We draw out, stir up, provoke, encourage, and fan into flame their gifts.

A Gospel Choreographer/Conductor

Marriage counselors are like the choreographer of a dance scene in a Broadway play. We are like the conductor of a Philharmonic Orchestra. We sense a family’s unique family dance and assist them to “flow” (to leave, weave, cleave, and receive). We listen to the harmony of their unique family music, and help them blend and co-create a beautiful new joint symphony.

A Gospel Cheerleader

Marriage counselors offer hope and provide encouragement. We look with spiritual eyes to spot resources and successes and point these out to couples. With faith eyes we envision together what God is up to and how couples can cling to Christ to join what he is doing in and through their marriage.

A Gospel Care-fronter (Confronting in Care)

We are not naïve. We do not ignore problems, weaknesses, and sins. We confront out of concern—we are care-fronters. We humbly (Gal. 6:1) speak gospel truth in love (Eph. 4:15), gently exposing sin (2 Tim. 2:24-26), helping couples to face their heart sins, repent, find forgiveness (James 4:1-8), and experience the power of grace to change (Titus 2:11-14).

A Gospel Church Representative

Regardless of the setting—church or para-church—as biblical counselors we envision ourselves as shepherds representing the body of Christ. This means we never see counseling simply as something done alone in an office. We do not want churches *with* biblical counseling. We desire churches *of* biblical counseling—where one-another ministry saturates *everything*. This means we always see the one hour a week of marital counseling as a sub-set of the larger, ongoing ministry of the church. We connect the couple with the

body of Christ: worship, preaching, small groups, advocates, personal Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and more.

A Gospel Craftsman

A true craftsman, whether the expert carpenter or renowned artist, moves beyond rudimentary skills. True craftsmen spontaneously use the gifts of God implanted in them by his Spirit. You will take “Kellemen stuff” and make it your own. Taking some here. Leaving some there. Weaving in your own biblical studies and counseling experiences here. Blending in the biblical teaching of others there. Be yourself—your healthy, maturing, Christlike self.

A Gospel Construction Foreman

We are not the architect—God is. He is the Designer who has given us the blueprint for marriage. But we can be like construction foremen. We use the blueprint he has given us, and we work with the crew (the couple) to empower them to “get the job done.” We help the couple to organize themselves as one united organism.

A Gospel Co-Creator

Frequently couples enter counseling living that shame, blame, claim, and maim narrative we exposed from Genesis 3. With Christ and the couple we co-create and co-author a new grace, forgiveness, acceptance, and responsibility marital narrative.

A Gospel Cop

This is a startling image. However, it is a necessary one at times because sometimes couples come to us in such disarray that they need to be protected from each other. Someone strong needs to step in to “protect and serve.” Within a session, this means saying, “While I want the two of you to be honest, that tone and those words are destructive. I can’t allow that during our meetings.” Between sessions it may mean anything from calling the appropriate authorities, to bringing church discipline, to recommending a temporary separation for the safety of a spouse.

A Gospel Collaborator (Co-Laborer)

If “cop” was startling, then “co-laborer” is meant to be summarizing. We co-labor with Christ, the couple, and the body of Christ to produce something beautiful. We co-labor with them so that they find Christ’s power to sustain, heal, reconcile, and guide one another—which leads us to our final focus for this chapter...

Maturing as a Biblical Marriage Counselor
Our Role: Envisioning Ourselves as Collaborators Through Gospel Coaching

➤ Review the 10 images of a biblical marriage counselor:

1. A Gospel Coach
2. A Gospel Choreographer/Conductor
3. A Gospel Cheerleader
4. A Gospel Care-fronter (Confronting in Care)
5. A Gospel Church Representative
6. A Gospel Craftsman
7. A Gospel Construction Foreman
8. A Gospel Co-Creator
9. A Gospel Cop
10. A Gospel Collaborator (Co-Laborer)

1. Which two or three of these images stand out to you as most important for you to develop as a biblical marriage counselor? Why? How could you grow in those two or three areas?

2. Which two or three of these images are you already strengths for you? How did Christ grow them in you to this point? How could you keep growing in those two or three areas?

3. What additional images would you add to this list? Describe each image.

Our Approach: Equipping Couples to Care for Each Other Through Gospel Conversations

Picture Trish and DeWayne. They committed to love each other “for better, for worse” and right now they are in the “for worse” period. Trish is irate because she is not sure she can trust DeWayne. He lost his job and “lied to me about it for weeks!” DeWayne feels condemned—even before he lost his job—like “there’s nothing I could ever do that would measure up to Trish’s perfectionistic standards!” They are each deeply hurt by each other. And they are deeply hurting each other.

As we noted in the book’s Introduction, individual counseling is messy enough. But marriage counseling is exponentially messier. So we need a GPS—Gospel Positioning Scripture—wisdom to know where to start and where to move. Biblical marriage counselors need the prayer Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

We want to share Christ’s love with DeWayne and Trish with biblical counseling wisdom that best encourages their love to be pure and their relationship to be filled with Christ’s righteousness so their marriage glorifies God.

But where do we start? Well, any counselor is going to say, “We start by listening to more of their story.” Agreed. Let’s say we have done that. Then, any biblical counselor would say, “We focus on their heart issues, not just on surface behavioral matters.” Agreed. But whose heart issues first? And which heart issues—the heart of their hurt and their suffering? Or, the heart of their hurting each other and their sinning? What is our biblical guide?

2 Guideposts for Biblical Marriage Counseling

In *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling*, we will follow a GPS derived from God’s Word and the history of Christian soul care. It provides two guideposts and four compass points for biblical marriage counseling.

Our biblical approach to marriage counseling will address *both* marital suffering *and* marital sin, both hurting hearts *and* hard hearts, both comforting *and* confronting. In the words of Frank Lake, “Pastoral care is defective unless it can deal *thoroughly* with the evils we have suffered as well as with the sins we have committed.”¹

Guidepost #1: Biblical Marriage Counseling for Suffering

Clearly, both DeWayne and Trish are suffering. What does the Bible offer them in their marital pain? Among the many New Testament words for spiritual care, *parakaleo* (comfort, encourage, console) predominates, appearing 109 times. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, Paul pictures God as the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (a form of the word *parakaleo*). Paul then teaches that the best comforters are those who go to God for

comfort: “who comforts us in all our troubles, *so that* we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:4).

The word *parakaleo* emphasizes personal presence—one called alongside to help. It also highlights the idea of empathy and suffering with another person or couple—weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15). The English word “comfort” when broken down, pictures well the biblical idea: co-fortitude—*shared sorrow is endurable sorrow*.

In *parakletic* marriage counseling we seek to turn Trish and DeWayne’s desolation into consolation through *hope in God*. Here, the word “encouragement,” when broken down, pictures the idea well: en-courage—to put courage into. Encouragers come alongside to help struggling, suffering spouses through personal presence coupled with scriptural wisdom that directs the couple’s gaze and focus to God’s eternal perspective.

When Christ ascended, he sent the Holy Spirit to be our *Parakletos*—our Comforter and Advocate called alongside to encourage and help us in times of suffering, trouble, grief, injustice, and hardship. The Spirit performs his ministry by being in us and by revealing truth to us (John 14:16-17). As the Spirit of Truth, his ministry is the exact opposite of Satan who is the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan’s name is “the Accuser” (Rev. 12:10) and his core strategy is to speak lying words of condemnation to us. The Spirit’s name is “Encourager” and “Advocate” and his ministry is to speak gospel truth in love about our justification and reconciliation in Christ.

Think about what Paul is saying to *you*. You don’t have to have a Ph.D. in marital therapy to become a competent *parakaletic* marriage counselor. You have the *Resource* planted within you—the *Parakletos*, the Holy Spirit—so that you can comfort and encourage Trish and DeWayne to hope in God and believe that *God is good even when their marital life is bad*.

Guidepost #2: Biblical Marriage Counseling for Sin

In Romans 15:14, Paul says that the Christians in Rome are competent to *counsel, instruct, and disciple*. Here he uses a form of the Greek word *noutheteo*, which occurs eleven times in the New Testament. Jay Adams, the founder of the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (now the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors), describes nouthetic counseling as *confronting for change out of concern*.²

Noutheteo emphasizes inner heart change leading to relational change. The foundational meaning of the word comes from the root *noeo* meaning to direct one’s mind, to perceive, and from *nous*—the heart, mind, seat of spiritual, rational, and moral insight and action. The mind is the place of practical reason leading to moral action. The stress is not merely on the intellect, but also on motivation and affections. *Noutheteo* means to impart understanding, to set right, to lay on the heart. Nouthetic impartation of truth can take on many forms such as encouraging, urging, spurring on, teaching, reminding, admonishing, reconciling, guiding, and advising.

Paul uses *noutheteo* in Colossians 1:20-29 to describe one aspect of his multifaceted pastoral ministry. God commissioned him to present Christ’s gospel of grace to people (1:20-25), infusing people with the hope of who they are in Christ (1:26-27), with the goal of presenting them mature in Christ (1:28), through personal, passionate, persistent involvement in their lives (1:28-29), by Christ’s resurrection power (1:29).

So, Paul is saying in Romans 15:14 that believers like *you* are competent to disciple couples like DeWayne and Trish toward communion with Christ and conformity to Christ through the personal ministry of the Word—biblical marriage counseling. Through loving *nouthetic* ministry, they can internalize the truth that *God is gracious even when their marital relationship is sinful* and that *his grace that saves is also his grace that sanctifies and changes their marriage*.

4 Compass Points for Biblical Marriage Counseling

While marriage counseling can be complex and messy, we will keep our GPS as simple as possible. Just as a map has the four compass points of N-S-E-W, so our biblical marriage counseling model has the four compass points of S-H-R-G: Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding. Figure 4:1 pictures it for us.³ For each of our compass points, we look first at what it looks like in individual counseling. Then, we will make the transition to what it looks like in marital counseling.

Figure 4:1

Comprehensive and Compassionate Biblical Marriage Counseling ***Parakaletic* Biblical Marriage Counseling for Suffering Spouses**

- **Sustaining:** *“Like Christ, We Care About Each Other’s Hurts”*
- **Healing:** *“Through Christ, It’s Possible for Us to Hope in God Together”*

***Nouthetic* Biblical Marriage Counseling for Sinning Spouses**

- **Reconciling:** *“It’s Horrible to Sin Against Christ and Each Other, but Through Christ It’s Wonderful to Be Forgiven and to Forgive”*
- **Guiding:** *“It’s Supernatural to Love Each Other Like Christ, Through Christ, for Christ”*

Biblical Compass Point #1: Sustaining—“Like Christ, We Care About Each Other’s Hurts”

Sustaining involves joining with others in their suffering—comforting them as we weep with them. We grieve together, empathizing with them—compassionately identifying with them in their pain. Sustaining gives the other person permission to grieve. It communicates the biblical truth that *it’s normal to hurt* when our fallen world falls on us. Sustaining enters the other person’s troubling earthly story of suffering and despair.

I use a rather macabre image to capture the essence of sustaining ministry: *climbing in the casket*. I’ve developed this picture from 2 Corinthians 1 where Paul says he does not want his brothers and sisters in Christ to be ignorant about the hardships he had suffered.

Paul continues, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8b-9a). When Paul despaired of life and felt the sentence of death, he wanted the Corinthians to “climb in his casket”—to identify with what felt like a death sentence.

It is important that we learn to offer DeWayne and Trish our sustaining comfort. However, remember a vital principle that we will repeat often: *marriage counseling is not individual counseling with an audience*. If DeWayne watches me comfort Trish, and then Trish watches me sustain DeWayne, that is good, but it is not best (remember Phil. 1:9-11). What is best is when they begin to communicate to each other, “*Like Christ, we care about each other’s hurts*.” Ponder how extraordinary that is. DeWayne and Trish are at each other’s throats. They are causing each other’s hurt. They are focused almost exclusively on their own pain. But in Christ, they can move to deep heart change where they start caring deeply about their spouse’s pain—pain they have often caused.

In chapters 6 and 7, we will learn biblical marriage counseling competencies that help Trish and DeWayne climb in each other’s casket, give each other permission to grieve, and weep with each other. They will become each other’s best *parakaletic* biblical counselor by sustaining each other in Christ through restoring each other’s trust in the Father of compassion. We do this by asking ourselves the sustaining question we identified earlier: “How can I help this couple find their gospel comfort in Christ so they can comfort each other?”

Biblical Compass Point #2: Healing—“Through Christ, It’s Possible for Us to Hope in God Together”

In biblical counseling through healing, we journey with sufferers to Christ, encouraging them to live today in light of Christ and his eternal hope. When bad things happen to God’s people, Satan attempts to crop Christ out of the picture. He tempts couples like Trish and DeWayne to conclude, “Our marriage is bad; God is sovereign; so God must be bad, too!” God calls us to *crop Christ into their picture*. We have the privilege of journeying with DeWayne and Trish so they listen together to God’s eternal story of healing hope in Christ alone. We move with them to the place where they can say with conviction, “Life is bad, but God is good. He’s good *all* the time—the cross of Christ forever proves this!”

To balance the sustaining image of *climbing in the casket*, I capture the essence of healing ministry with *celebrating the empty tomb*! Earlier we read 2 Corinthians 1:8b-9a. I purposefully stopped before the end of verse 9. Paul continues, “But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9b). Paul does not remain in the casket because Jesus did not remain in the tomb! Because of the resurrection, it is always possible to hope!

Consider again the subtle yet vital mindset shift we must make in marital counseling compared to individual counseling. DeWayne and Trish meet with me one hour a week, which, of course, means they are apart from me the other 167 hours in the week. It is not enough for me to be the one who points each of them individually to Christ’s healing hope.

This is why, in chapters 8 and 9, we will learn biblical marriage counseling competencies that will help Trish and DeWayne say, “*Through Christ, it’s possible for us to hope in God together*.” They must become each other’s biblical en-couragers—putting Christ’s courage into their dis-couraged hearts and dis-couraged marriage. What an

amazing change this is. DeWayne and Trish have been crushing each other's hearts. Now, we have the joyful privilege of equipping them to be soul physicians for each other—doing open heart surgery on each other and infusing each other with hope in God! We do this by asking ourselves the healing question we identified earlier: "How can I help this couple find their gospel encouragement in Christ so they can encourage each other?"

Biblical Compass Point #3: Reconciling—"It's Horrible to Sin Against Christ and Each Other, but Through Christ It's Wonderful to Be Forgiven and to Forgive"

People come to us not only hurting, but also hurtful. They not only need biblical comfort and encouragement through *parakaletic* sustaining and healing; they also need biblical discipline and discipleship through *nouthetic* reconciling and guiding.

In reconciling, God calls us to expose sin humbly yet firmly—speaking gospel truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Like the early Christians, we are aware of the deceitfulness of sin, so we commit to being sure that no one has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (Heb. 3:7-19). Like Nathan with David, we have the ability to paint pictures that say, "You are the man! See your sin in all its horrors!" Like the Puritans, we are able, when necessary, to "load the conscience with guilt" so that hard hearts are softened by God's Spirit of truth.

Biblical reconciling does not stop with the exposure of heart sin. God also calls us to be skillful at magnifying grace—where we communicate that where sin abounds, grace mega-abounds (Rom. 5:20). We not only communicate that "it's horrible to sin," but also convey that "it's wonderful to be forgiven." In biblical reconciling, we communicate that "God is gracious to you, even when you are sinful." We not only load the conscience with guilt; like the Puritans, we lighten the conscience with grace.

The image I use to communicate reconciling is the picture of every Christian as a *dispenser of grace*. Grace is God's medicine of choice for our sin. Grace is God's prescription for our disgrace.

What does this look like in *marital* counseling? In chapters 10 and 11, we will learn biblical marriage counseling competencies that will help couples like Trish and DeWayne confess their sin to Christ and to each other, receive Christ's forgiveness, and forgive each other. In addition to Trish and DeWayne realizing that "it's horrible to sin," they communicate to each other, "*It's horrible to sin against Christ and each other.*" They begin to take the marital mote (Matt. 7:1-5) out of their eye and begin to accept responsibility for their own sinful responses (James 4:1-4). Because they each have been recipients of Christ's great grace, they also begin communicating to each other, "*Through Christ, it's wonderful to be forgiven and to forgive.*" Nothing is more amazing than watching Christ's amazing grace melt the hard hearts of couples like DeWayne and Trish (or Bob and Shirley). We do this by asking ourselves the reconciling question we identified earlier: "How can I help this couple find their gospel restoration in Christ so they can forgive each other, reconcile with each other, and have their marriage restored in Christ?"

Biblical Compass Point #4: Guiding—“It’s Supernatural to Love Each Other Like Christ, Through Christ, for Christ”

In biblical guiding, we help people discern how God empowers them to put off the old sinful ways and put on the new ways of the new person in Christ. We help them practice the biblical spiritual disciplines that connect them with Christ’s resurrection power (Phil. 3:10). We assist them in thinking through the implications of their identity in Christ and what Christ has already done for them (the gospel indicatives), and the implications of commands to obey Christ out of gratitude for grace (the gospel imperatives). We practice what first century Christians practiced in spurring one another on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:19-25).

In marriage counseling, we help couples live out the truth that, *“It’s supernatural to love each other like Christ, through Christ, for Christ.”* Their marital love reflects Christ’s love, their love is empowered by Christ, and their love has as its ultimate goal glorifying Christ. The grace that saves them is also the grace that empowers them to grow. Their growth in grace involves responding to and availing themselves of Christ’s resurrection power—the same power that raised Christ from the grave is in them (Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 3:10).

The picture I use for guiding is *fanning into flame the gift of God*. Our role is not to place power within our counselees. Our role is to stir up and fan into flame the gift of God *already* in them, just as Paul stirred up the gift of God in Timothy (2 Tim. 1:6-7).

In chapters 12 and 13, we will learn biblical marriage counseling competencies that will help Trish and DeWayne be each other’s spiritual director. In marriage counseling, we disciple DeWayne and Trish to disciple each other. They envision together their individual and joint identity in Christ. They empower each other to tap into Christ’s resurrection power. They equip each other to put on the full marital armor of God so that instead of fighting each other, they fight together against Satan—in Christ’s strength. Through the Spirit’s power they live out Ephesians 5 by loving each other like Christ. We do this by asking the guiding question we identified earlier: “How can I help this couple discover and apply gospel wisdom from Christ and his Word so they can discern together what is best and pure and glorifying to Christ?”

Marriage Counseling as “Spaghetti Relationships”

Reviewing our GPS, you might think marriage counseling is a nice, neat, easy, linear process where you quickly move directly from sustaining, to healing, to reconciling, to guiding. No.

I often call counseling “spaghetti relationships.” It is mixed up and messy. Yes, sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding provide a comprehensive map or GPS. However, the trek, the marriage counseling journey, is filled with detours, mountains, valleys, road closures, obstacles, and even accidents. So, do not imagine a straight line and do not see sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding as a straitjacket. View marriage counseling as a creative and artistic endeavor led by the Spirit as you and the couple dance together.

**Maturing as a Biblical Marriage Counselor
Our Approach: Equipping Couples to Care for
Each Other Through Gospel Conversations**

1. Regarding the *2 Guideposts*: We all tend to be a tad more inclined either toward focusing on comforting the suffering or confronting the sinning. Which are you more inclined toward? How could you further develop your skillfulness in the other?
2. Regarding the *4 Compass Points*: We all tend to be a tad more inclined toward one of these four: sustaining, healing, reconciling, or guiding. Which are you more inclined toward? How could you further develop your competencies in the other three?
3. This section (and this book) make the repeated point that marriage counseling is not individual counseling with an audience. This means our calling as biblical marriage counselors is not just to sustain, heal, reconcile, and guide each spouse. Instead, we are to *equip them* to sustain, heal, reconcile, and guide *each other*. You will develop these skills in subsequent chapters. So respond to the following sub-questions based upon your current understanding and competency.
 - a. How important to you think it is to help spouses to live out, *“Like Christ, we care about each other’s hurts”*? How hard do you think this will be? What skills do you think you need to develop?
 - b. How important to you think it is to help spouses to live out, *“Through Christ, it’s possible for us to hope in God together”*? How hard do you think this will be? What skills do you think you need to develop?
 - c. How important to you think it is to help spouses to live out, *“It’s horrible to sin against Christ and each other, but through Christ it’s wonderful to be forgiven and to forgive”*? How hard do you think this will be? What skills do you think you need to develop?
 - d. How important to you think it is to help spouses to live out, *“It’s supernatural to love each other like Christ, through Christ and for Christ”*? How hard do you think this will be? What skills do you think you need to develop?

¹Lake, *Clinical Theology*, 21.

²See Adams, *Competent to Counseling*, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, and *A Theology of Christian Counseling*.

³For a comprehensive development of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding, see Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*.