

**Scripture and Soul:
Implementing the Hermeneutical Spiral in
Biblical Counseling**

By

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Chapter 10

The Bible Is Relevant for That?

Bob Kellemen

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

Those who knew Ashley would have been shocked. She grew up in a Christian home, was active at church as an adult, served as a leader in the women's ministry, and was always "pleasant."

As Ashley described herself, "Yes, I'm the good girl from the good home. The good Mom; the good wife. But nobody knows the ugliness I feel inside. Nobody knows how I've pretended and denied all these years. I just can't keep faking it any longer. I'm a mess—depressed to the point that at times I've thought of suicide. Always fearful and anxious—terrified I'll displease someone. Terrified someone will find out what an empty but evil thing I am..."

As Ashley's voice trailed off, Nate asked me, "Pastor Bob, can you *help*? Does the Bible offer any *hope* for my wife?"¹

How you or I respond to Ashley's soul struggles and to Nate's life questions depends on how we answer at least two other fundamental questions about how we *view* and *use* the Bible:

- *Truth Questions*: "Where do we find wisdom for life in a broken world? How do we *view* God's Word for the personal ministry of the Word?"
- *Life Questions*: "How are we to relate truth to life, Scripture to soul? How do we *use* God's Word accurately, compassionately, and competently in the personal ministry of the Word?"

These two questions and the next two chapters serve as a bridge between the two sections of *Scripture and Counseling* as they cover both *viewing and using* the Bible for life in a broken world. Chapters 10 and 11 present: a.) a robust approach for *viewing* the Bible to develop a biblical model for addressing life issues, and b.) a relational approach to *using* the Bible to apply a biblical model for addressing life issues. They each use the issue of sexual abuse to illustrate the relevancy of Scripture for counseling concerns.

Toward a Biblical Theology of Biblical Counseling

Nate's questions are fair questions, especially since some within the church, when facing difficult issues such as sexual abuse, sadly either offer shallow answers or quickly refer. We sometimes avoid biblical theology for deep soul issues because we really are not convinced that the Bible is *profoundly* relevant, and because we really do not feel competent to discern how to apply the Bible to *significant* life issues. We need a biblical way to *view* and *use* the Bible for biblical counseling that shows, "Yes! The Bible is relevant for *that!*"

Nate and Ashley want to know, "Does the Bible truly offer richly relevant counsel for life in a broken world?" You and I want to know, "Does Christianity, the gospel, God's Word offer hope and healing for those who have experienced something as horrendous as sexual abuse?"

Much of the current debate in biblical counseling and Christian psychology revolves around the integration issue. Should or should not Christians integrate secular psychological theory into their theology and methodology of biblical counseling and Christian psychology? Obviously, this is a vital issue—or we would not have written *Scripture and Counseling*. However, these two chapters steer in another important direction. It is essential that those who say, "Do not use secular psychology to diagnose and treat matters of the soul," also say, "*Here's how to develop a*

biblical theology to diagnose matters of the soul and how to develop a biblical counseling approach to treat matters of the soul.”

This is a different “integration” issue. This one integrates *biblical truth and daily life*. It shows how to relate Christ’s changeless truth to our changing times.

Counsel for Soul Issues

For those convinced that the Bible provides counsel for significant soul issues, the next question is, “In what form are those answers provided?”

When dear folks like Ashley and Nate courageously share their raw concerns with people in the church, I’ve noticed that we tend to respond in one of three typical ways. First, some *refer*. The stereotype goes something like this: “I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggle. However, we have to understand that while the Bible provides insight for our ‘spiritual lives,’ God never intended that we use His Word to address ‘emotional and mental’ struggles. For relevant help for those issues, we need outside experts.” There’s confidence in God, but with a corresponding conviction that for “non-spiritual issues” God’s Word is not the most appropriate resource.

Second, some follow a *sprinkling* approach. The stereotype goes something like this: “I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggles. To the insights I’ve gleaned from the world’s wisdom about your issue, I’ll add Christian concern, prayer, and biblical principles where they seem pertinent.” There’s confidence in God’s Word as important in helping hurting people, but its application lacks an understanding of the vital, comprehensive, and authoritative nature of God’s Word for life in a broken world.

Third, some follow the *concordance* approach. The stereotype goes something like this: “I’m a committed Christian. I want to help you with your struggle. You have a problem. I’ll use my

Bible concordance to find God’s answer.” Some have called this the “one-problem, one-verse, one- solution” approach. There’s confidence in the Bible, but its application lacks an understanding of the complexity of life and the rich nature of God’s Word.

In each case, I have purposefully prefaced my comments with “the stereotype…” Life and counseling are infinitely more complex than three paragraphs can encapsulate. Further, it is *not* my intent to promote an “us against them,” or a “good guys/bad guys” mindset. Rather than accuse or antagonize, I hope to invite, encourage, and equip.

Instead of just saying, “Don’t do it *that way*,” I desire to increase our *confidence* in God’s Word for life in a broken world and increase our *competence* in applying Christ’s changeless truth to change lives. I believe that we follow other approaches (like *refer*, *sprinkle*, and *concordance*) and turn to other sources because:

- No one has equipped us to understand the richness and robustness of God’s sufficient Word for life in a broken world—helping us to develop *confidence* in how we *view* the Bible for real life.
- No one has equipped us to apply God’s authoritative truth to life relevantly and relationally—helping us to develop the *competence to use* God’s Words for real life issues.

From Scripture to Soul Care

My prayer is that the next two chapters will further equip us as biblical counselors to view and use the Bible in a “fourth way”—the *gospel narrative way*. If we are to view the Bible accurately and use the Bible competently, then we must understand the Bible’s story the way God tells it. And God tells His story and ours as the *drama of redemption*. It is a *gospel narrative of relationship*.

God begins by telling the story of relationship initiated in Genesis 1-2 and relationship rejected in Genesis 3. After those first three chapters, the rest of the Bible tells the story of God wooing us back by grace to His holy and loving arms, all the while fighting the Evil One who wants to seduce us away from our first love.

Ever since Genesis 3, *life is a battle for our love*—the ageless question of who captures our heart—Christ or Satan. In *Soul Physicians*, I encapsulated all of life as “a war and a wedding.”² Others have described it picturesquely as “slay the dragon; marry the damsel.” The Bible calls it “the gospel.”

Our counseling is sterile and dead if we see the Bible as an academic textbook or even as a textbook for counseling. But if we *view and use* the Bible as the story—the gospel-centered drama—of the battle to win our hearts, then our one-another ministry comes alive.

The Bible presents a grand narrative in which God is both the Author and the Hero, with the story climaxing in Christ. A gospel-centered approach to the Bible focuses less on the stories and more on *the Story*; less on the heroes and more on *the Hero*.

The Bible provides relational wisdom for significant soul issues in a *gospel narrative form*. This requires that we view the Scriptures and life through the biblical lens of Christ’s gospel of grace and through the biblical grid of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation (see below). This big picture perspective provides the framework we use to conceptualize problems using biblical wisdom principles that apply the gospel of grace to the complexity of real and raw life as lived in a fallen and broken world.

We need a process that teaches us how to do biblical exegesis *for biblical counseling*. How do we view and use the Bible to help people to grow in grace, to help people in the progressive

sanctification process, to help people to deal biblically with issues of suffering and sin? *Figure 1* below overviews a process that moves us toward answering this vital question.

As you read *Figure 1*, don't panic. Yes, it's complex—because life is complex. Yes, it's involved and detailed—because studying Scripture deeply takes thought, time, and effort.

Think of this as learning how to fish rather than being given a fish. Unfortunately, many times when it comes to Scripture and counseling, we're not taught how to fish (the *refer*, *sprinkle*, and *concordance* approaches). Other times we're just given a fish—some book that presents the author's approach to relating Scripture to a counseling concern. But we never get to peek behind the curtain to see how the author moved step-by-step from Scripture to the life issue.

In these two chapters, I want to pull back the curtain and invite you into the process of moving from Scripture to soul care. To keep this complex, involved journey practical, we're going to use the outline as a guide or map to discover the richness of God's Word when applied wisely to difficult life issues such as sexual abuse recovery.

I want to walk you through a detailed approach where you start with a counseling issue, engage the Scriptures dynamically concerning that issue, and then move into the life of the counselee with biblical wisdom and love. My prayer for you is Paul's prayer for you. "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 pure and be blameless until the day of Christ...to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

I still remember the first time I counseled someone who had been sexually abused. I knew the Bible was relevant, but I did not understand how to relate God's Word to sexual abuse recovery. It was three decades ago and I could not find solidly biblical materials. I was

Figure 1

Toward a Biblical Theology of Biblical Counseling **How Do We *View and Use* (Study and Apply) the Bible to Help People in a Broken World?**

- I. Clarify the Life Issue for Biblical Study: What Area of Concern Am I Studying?
 - A. Probe Life Labels Related to This Life Issue
 - B. Ponder Biblical Categories that Potentially Overlap with This Life Issue
 1. Theology of Life Categories: Creation/Fall/Redemption/Consummation (CFRC)
 2. Theology of Image Bearers Categories: Relational, Rational, Volitional, Emotional, and Physical (RRVEP)
 3. Methodology of Biblical Counseling Categories: Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding (SHRG)

- II. Focus Your Scriptural Study Using Gospel-Colored Lenses: What Is the Theme and Trajectory of the Bible?

- III. Explore the Scriptures by Taking Your Real-Life Questions to God's Word: How Do We Accurately Relate God's Truth to Our Lives?
 - A. Redemptive Narrative Theology: What's the Big Picture?—Context
 - B. Academic Theology: What?—Content/Categories
 1. Systematic Theology
 2. Biblical Theology
 3. Exegetical Theology
 4. Lexical Theology
 5. Textual Theology
 - C. Spiritual Theology: So What?—Connections
 - D. Practical/Pastoral Theology: What Now?—Competence

- IV. Examine Past and Current Biblical Research on This Life Issue: How Do We Humbly Respect the Wisdom of Others?
 - A. Historical Theology: What Then?—Contributions of Predecessors
 - B. Current Theology: Who Else?—Contributions of Contemporaries

- V. Evaluate Descriptive Research Regarding This Life Area: How Do We Use Research as a Catalyst for Deep Thinking?
 - A. What Does the Descriptive Research Say about This Life Issue?
 - B. Analyze This Data in Light of Your Biblical Interpretations

- VI. Synthesize Your Findings: How Do We Develop a Relevant Working Model of Biblical Counseling for Life Issues?
 - A. Develop a Biblical Counseling Theology of This Life Issue: A Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation Biblical Counseling Diagnosis
 - B. Develop a Biblical Counseling Methodology for This Life Issue: A Biblical Counseling Intervention/Soul Care Treatment Plan

determined to understand what the Scriptures said about sexual abuse, the damage done to the soul, and the healing hope offered by the gospel. But where would I start? Basically I had to reinvent the wheel in terms of developing a step-by-step approach to examining the Bible for a specific biblical counseling issue. After thirty years of tweaking, modifying, and maturing my approach, I want to keep you from having to reinvent the wheel.

Having said that, I understand that I have not cornered the market on the wheel! This section's header reads: *toward a biblical theology of biblical counseling*. In 1981, Walter Kaiser penned his now classic work *Toward an Exegetical Theology*.³ By using the word *toward*, Kaiser humbly acknowledged that his was not the final word, but one initial attempt at developing an exegetical model of theology. I am suggesting the same: the approach I'm proposing is my current best attempt at *one* model for studying and applying the Bible to help people to grow in grace. It is neither the *final* model nor *the* model.

The Hermeneutical Spiral for Biblical Counseling

I've embedded in *Figure 1* and developed further in *Figure 2* what students of the Bible call "the hermeneutical spiral." It refers to the idea that we understand a specific text within the context of the whole of the Bible, and that we understand the whole of the Bible with reference to the individual texts. We can neither interpret the individual passages or the whole of the Bible without reference to each other.

The hermeneutical spiral developed in chapters 10 and 11 takes the works of leaders in the field such as Grant Osborne, Anthony Thiselton, and Kevin Vanhoozer, among others, and translates their perspectives to the field of biblical counseling.⁴ *Figure 2* outlines one model for using one formulation of the hermeneutical spiral for biblical counseling.

Figure 2

The Hermeneutical Spiral for Biblical Counseling

Redemptive Narrative Theology: Framework and Focus—Theme and Trajectory

“What’s the Big Picture?”: Context—Redemptive Movement

Academic Theology: Foundation—Information/Knowledge

“What?”: Content and Conviction—Truth

Systematic Theology

Biblical Theology

Exegetical Theology

Lexical Theology

Textual Theology

Spiritual Theology: Formation—Transformation/Wisdom

“So What?”: Connection, Categories, and Constructs—Relevance

Practical/Pastoral Theology: Friendship—Application/Love

“What Now?”: Competence, Care, and Cure—Relationship

Historical Theology: Forebears—Validation/Confirmation

“What Then?”: Church History and Contributions of Predecessors

“Who Else?”: Current Theology and Contributions of Contemporaries

As you explore *Figures 1 and 2*, realize that because of the nature of communication, any model has to be presented using a somewhat linear method. While the outline and development of this model will be organized step-by-step in linear fashion, the *order* is less important than the

overall process. You could jump in at almost any point in the hermeneutical spiral. You could choose for practical reasons to start at different points in the outline. You could and should move back and forth within the process; it is *not* a strait jacket.

Clarify the Life Issue for Biblical Study: What Area of Concern Am I Studying?

Imagine that Nate has just asked you, “Can you help? Does the Bible offer any hope for my wife?” After your initial meeting with Ashley and Nate, you’re deeply motivated to study the Bible for a biblical counseling approach to sexual abuse. You assume, of course, that your first “step” must be to open your Bible. Anything less or different, some would assume, would be less than biblical.

However, there is a *logical* preliminary starting point even before building the *theological* foundation. Obviously, before examining something biblically we must ponder “*What is it that I am examining biblically?*” In this preliminary stage, we’re seeking to identify our area of concern. We’re beginning to label and focus our research—trying to develop our awareness of the type of specific life issues and questions that we are bringing to the text of Scripture. Of course, because the process is a spiral, the preliminary categories we developed will be deepened, stretched, altered, strengthened, and challenged at each “step” in the ongoing process.

Probe Life Labels Related to This Life Issue

Using the language and categories of real life as lived today, attempt to label your area of biblical counseling research. Are you studying sexual abuse? Depression? Anxiety? Idolatry of the heart? Addiction/enslavement/besetting sin? Forgiveness? Reconciliation?

What Questions Do I Need to Address?

With Ashley, you're focused on the life issue of sexual abuse recovery. You'll want to ask yourself every question about sexual abuse and recovery that comes to mind. Brainstorming is invaluable. Examples are limitless.

How is sexual abuse defined? What does recovery look like? How does sexual abuse impact the body? The soul? What does it do to issues of trust? How does it relate to shame? Self-hatred? How does it impact one's sense of femininity? Masculinity? What is sexuality? What is gender? What is masculinity? What is femininity? What difference does it make if the sexual abuse was same-sex abuse? What sinful categories explain the sinful motivation of the abuser? What difference does the gospel make? How does forgiveness play a part? Confrontation? Restitution? Reconciliation?

In Church History, Who Has Examined This and What Issues Did They Address?

Later in the process, under historical theology, we will look for answers—for past wisdom that we can relate to life today. For now, we're exploring more for basic awareness. We are not alone. Even issues like sexual abuse have been dealt with by that great cloud of past witnesses.⁵ We record what questions they asked and add their insightful probings to ours.

In Current Biblical Counseling Who Is Exploring This and What Issues Are They Addressing?

Again, later we'll probe the works of others for their answers. For now, we're still trying to raise our awareness. My own experience and encouragement is to "be brief" at this stage. While we want to increase our awareness of the type of questions to bring to the text of Scripture, we don't want to be unduly influenced by the theory and practice of others.

In Secular Psychology, Who Is Researching This and What Questions Are They Addressing?

Some would suggest that we should avoid this stage. However, biblical counselors have longed believed that there is a potential catalytic impact that can be produced when we assess the research being done and weigh the questions being raised in the world of psychology. We don't have to ask the same questions or speak the same "psychologized" language. The research performed and questions raised can drive us back to Scripture with our real and raw questions.

What Experience, If Any, Do I Have Counseling with This Issue and What Questions Has My Counseling Raised That I Will Want to Explore?

We never place human experience parallel to biblical truth. However, Solomon clearly used his life experiences in writing Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (under the Spirit's inspiration). He brought his life lived under the sun to the Son of God and asked hard questions and offered practical counsel. We can do the same. When we do so with an issue like sexual abuse, some of the questions we may raise, with the hopes of them being answered in later "stages" of our study, might include, "Why is sexual abuse so powerfully painful?" "Why are the emotions so intense?" "Why is forgiveness so difficult?" "Why is silence and secrecy often the response of choice?" "What happens in the female and male soul when sexual abuse occurs?" "Is sexual abuse just body abuse, or is it more soul abuse and gender abuse?"

What Experience, If Any, Do I Have Dealing with This Personally, and What Questions Has My Experience Raised That I Will Want to Explore?

Even if you have not experienced sexual abuse, you can still ponder the impact of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse, and spiritual abuse upon your own soul. And if not sexually abused yourself, you can ponder the impact of sexual abuse upon family members and friends. Such ponderings assist you to bring pertinent, relevant, real-life questions to the text of Scripture.

Ponder Biblical Categories That Potentially Overlap with This Life Issue

The point of probing life labels is to help you to move from a merely academic approach to the issue of sexual abuse to a real-life approach. It also helps you to move from a mere one-verse-one problem-one solution mentality. Pondering life categories begins to create in your mind the awareness of the depth of issues, the complexity of life, and the richness of the Scriptures.

The questions you raised now arm you with life categories that you can *begin to bring to the text*—still in a preliminary way. At this time, the point is *not* to answer your questions. The point is to *raise* further questions—to deepen your understanding of the type of issues that you’ll want to examine through narrative, academic, spiritual, practical, and historical theology.

What Examples of a Similar Topic Do I Find in the Scriptures?

Armed with your life categories related to sexual abuse, you can begin to “browse” Scripture. What passages address issues like sex, sexuality, masculinity, gender, rape, incest, sexual abuse (and all the other life categories you collated)? For example, you can list all the “texts of terror” passages in Genesis where men used and abused women (Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-16; 19:4-11; 19:30-38; 20:1-18; 21:8-21; 26:7-11; 34:1-31; 38:1-30). You can list Amnon’s rape of his half sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-39). These passages and many others become sources for your academic theology study.

Where Do I Find Similar Categories, Issues, Concepts, and Constructs in the Scriptures?

Sometimes specific passages may not seem to address “sexual abuse.” However, Genesis 1-3 surely addresses gender, maleness, femaleness, male-female relationships, and much more, showing both God’s original design and the impact of human depravity upon each of these areas. Even concepts such as being naked and unashamed, and then concepts such as being afraid

because of nakedness and the resultant hiding are all vital to the development of a theology of sexual abuse recovery.

What Wisdom Principles Address Similar Categories, Issues, Concepts, and Constructs?

One way to categorize questions is to use:

- Theology of Life Categories: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation (CFRC)⁶
- Theology of Image Bearers Categories: Relational (Spiritual, Social, Self-Aware), Rational, Volitional, Emotional, and Physical Beings (RRVEP)⁷
- Methodology of Biblical Counseling Categories: Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding (SHRG)⁸

The rest of this chapter and all of chapter 11 will illustrate how to use these categories. Your task in this stage is to raise questions so you develop biblically astute concepts and real-life wisdom categories that you'll take to God's Word.

Theology of Life Categories

Consider some examples of prompting questions for sexual abuse that you might develop under the theology of life categories:

- *Ponder Creation/People: "How did God originally design us to function in this area?"*
As sexual beings? As gendered beings? As males? As females? What does it mean to be naked and unashamed? What is soul shalom? Sexual shalom? Where in Scripture are these questions addressed?
- *Ponder Fall/Problems: "How has sin marred our functioning in this area?"* As sexual beings? As gendered beings? As males? As females? What is shame? Nakedness? Hiding? Self-covering? Why are there so many texts of terror in Genesis—what is God trying to tell us about the impact of sin upon sex and sexuality?

- *Ponder Redemption/Solutions: “How has redemption provided us victory in this area?”*
How does the gospel speak into this issue? How does new life in Christ and our new identity in Christ relate to this issue? What is the process of movement toward mature biblical maleness? Femaleness? Forgiveness? Moving from shame to shalom? Confrontation? Reconciliation? Justice? Where in Scripture are these questions addressed?
- *Ponder Consummation: “What impact now does Christ’s final triumph over sin and suffering have in this area?”* What tears, sorrow, pain, and mourning will be wiped away in that great day? What hope does everlasting life hold for us? How can the truth that our greatest sorrows will be swallowed up relate to this issue today?

Theology of Image Bearers Categories

Consider some examples of exploratory questions for sexual abuse that you might develop under the theology of image bearers categories:

- *Ponder Relational (Spiritual, Social, Self-Aware) Beings: “What does the Bible teach about relational beings in this area?”* How do godly affections (creation), false lovers/broken cisterns (fall), and grace-inspired worship (redemption) relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How did God design our longings, desires, thirsts, and affections? How does sexual abuse mar our longings, desires, thirsts, and affections? How does redemption help us to put off ungodly and put on godly longings, desires, thirsts, and affections in response to sexual abuse?
- ✓ *Ponder Relational Spiritual Beings: “What does the Bible teach about spiritual beings in this area?”* How does sexual abuse impact a person’s image of God as

Father? Image of Christ? Image of the Spirit? Longings for God? Prayer life?

Application of Scripture?

- ✓ *Ponder Relational Social Beings: “What does the Bible teach about social beings in this area?”* How does sexual abuse impact a person’s social relationships—to the abuser, to non-abusers, to members of the same sex, of the opposite sex?
- ✓ *Ponder Relational Self-Aware Beings: “What does the Bible teach about self-aware beings in this area?”* How does sexual abuse impact one’s sense of self? One’s identity in Christ? One’s Christ-esteem and Christ-image? Sense of shame/shalom? Sense of guilt/worth/blame? One’s gender identity?
- *Ponder Rational Beings: “What does the Bible teach about rational beings in this area?”* How do godly mindsets (creation), foolish mindsets (fall), and wise mindsets (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What images of God, others, self, and of life develop in the core of the mind as a result of sexual abuse and how can they be renewed by the gospel? What ideas/beliefs/convictions about life develop in the core of the mind as a result of sexual abuse and how can they be renewed through the gospel?
- *Ponder Volitional Beings: “What does the Bible teach about volitional beings in this area?”* How do godly purposes (creation), self-centered purposes (fall), and other-centered purposes (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What ungodly styles of relating, goals, motives/motivations, purposes, behaviors, actions, and interactions develop as a result of sexual abuse and how are they renewed through salvation? How are they rehabilitated through grace-based means of growth such as spiritual disciplines, soul care, spiritual direction, and spiritual friendship?

- *Ponder Emotional Beings: “What does the Bible teach about emotional beings in this area?”* How do godly mood states (creation), ungoverned mood states (fall), and Christ-submitted mood states (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What ungodly ways of handling emotions (and which emotions) develop as a result of sexual abuse? How can emotions be comforted by the Father, be soothed in Christ, and be healed by the Spirit?
- *Ponder Physical Beings: “What does the Bible teach about physical beings in this area?”* How is God’s original design for the mind/body connection distorted by sexual abuse? How can a sexual abuse victim learn once again to yield the members of the body to God as an act of worship?

Methodology of Biblical Counseling Categories

Consider some examples of prompting questions for sexual abuse that you might develop under the methodology of biblical counseling categories:

- *Ponder Sustaining: “In this area, what would it look like to sustain someone and help them to know that it’s normal to hurt?”* What is the “hurt” of sexual abuse? How does the gospel bring comfort to the abuse victim? How does the Christ of the cross bring comfort to the abuse victim? How do I empathize with the pain of sexual abuse? How does the Spirit comfort the agony and shame of sexual abuse?
- *Ponder Healing: “In this area, what would it look like to offer Christ’s healing encouragement to someone and to help them to know that it’s possible to hope?”* What is “healing” and “recovery” from sexual abuse? What does it look like as an RRVEP being? How does Christ’s gospel of grace speak into the pain of abuse? How can I bring biblical encouragement without being trite? How do spiritual eyes/faith eyes look at and re-interpret sexual abuse from God’s perspective?

- *Ponder Reconciling: “In this area, what would it look like to bring Christ’s reconciling grace to someone and to help them to know the horrors of sin and the wonders of forgiveness?”* How can I help the abuse victim to apply the gospel to their abuse? What is God’s attitude toward the abuser? What does that mean? Look like? What are sinful responses to sexual abuse (not being guilty of being abused, but responding to the abuse in non-God ways)? How do I expose sinful responses without “victimizing the victim”? What does forgiveness of the abuser look like? How is it different from forgetting? What role should restitution and justice play?
- *Ponder Guiding: “In this area, what would it look like to guide someone and help them to know that it’s supernatural to mature?”* How does our new identity in Christ as saints and sons/daughters impact the change/growth/healing process? What is spiritual maturity as an RRVEP being for a sexual abuse victim? What spiritual processes can help the sexual abuse victim to tap into Christ’s resurrection power to become more like Jesus?

Focus Your Scriptural Study Using Gospel-Colored Lenses: What Is the Theme and Trajectory of the Bible?

Picture where we are in our journey. Ashley and Nate have asked us if the Bible has answers for Ashley’s sexual abuse—does it offer hope? We know it does because we know the Bible is not only sufficient; it is relevant. As we’ve taken our real-life questions about sexual abuse to the Bible, we’ve seen the richness of Scripture.

But we can’t come back to Ashley and Nate only with great questions. We’re seeking gospel-centered wisdom for life. We know that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3) and we’ll identify signposts on that treasure hunt in chapter 11. Before we do that, we need to view the Christ-centered “the lay of the land” from Paul in Colossians.

Paul’s Gospel Lenses for Relating Truth to Life

If Philippians 1:9-11 is Paul’s prayer for the biblical counselor, then Colossians 1:3-14 is Paul’s pattern for developing a gospel-centered approach to biblical counseling. As Paul wrote to the believers in Colosse, their situation mirrored ours. They were saints—“holy and faithful brothers in Christ” (Colossians 1:2). They were also sons and daughters of “God our Father” (Colossians 1:2). Though forgiven and welcomed home by God through Christ (Colossians 1:13, 22), they were facing suffering—condemnation from Satan (Colossians 1:22), judgment by others (Colossians 2:16), interpersonal grievances and struggles (Colossians 3:13, 15), and family discord (Colossians 3:19-21). They also battled the same temptations to sin that we face—sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, and lying (Colossians 3:5-9).

Paul’s mission is to relate gospel truth to the Colossians’ relationship: *with God*—that they would be mature in Christ, *with one another*—that they would be united in love, and *with themselves*—that they would be encouraged in heart (Colossians 1:28; 2:2). Paul models for us counseling that sees God’s Word as relational and relevant to life in our broken world.

Paul also models for us counseling that is gospel-centered and Christ-focused. Instead of allowing the pressure to provide a quick answer to drive him to simplistic solutions, Paul goes “big picture” by focusing on the larger story—the *largest* story—“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Rather than offering smaller story “steps” or “keys,” Paul invites his Colossian friends to journey with him so “they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3).

The Good News as the Epi-Center of the Good Book

Paul's purpose in responding to the real life concerns of the Colossian believers was to call them back to the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, the gospel, Scripture, and Christianity for salvation *and for life today*. He does so by helping them and us to understand the gospel narrative—the drama of redemption.

To the Colossians, struggling to know how to live well and wisely, Paul opens the curtain to the main movement in the drama of redemption—victory, resurrection. Then Paul points the spotlight on the main character in the drama of redemption—*Christ*. He rejoices with the Colossians that they have “faith in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:3). He points their attention to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, reminding them what they had embraced “...the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth” (Colossians 1:5-6).

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

Paul says, “You want to know about change? About victory? Listen to the gospel announcement of Christ's victory! And I'm not talking only about past victory over sin, as amazing as that is. I'm also talking about *ongoing* victory in our *daily* battles as we face suffering and struggle against sin.” That's why Paul reminds them—as *believers*—that this

gospel is *continuing* to bear fruit and grow “just as it *has been doing since the day you heard and understood it*” (Colossians 1:6, emphasis added).

Paul is *not* in any way minimizing, nor am I, the *eternal* significance of the gospel. In Christ “we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin” (Colossians 1:14). In Christ we have been reconciled to God (Colossians 1:22). Paul *is* teaching them and us that counsel that is truly biblical is built upon applying the gospel to everyday life. That’s the foundational message that Ashley and Nate need to hear.

A gospel-centered focus is less a “stage” in the process and more a “mindset” or “viewpoint” that must color every other stage. The central point of the Bible is not to provide counseling answers for life’s struggles. However, the central theme and trajectory of the Bible—the gospel—does relate to counseling because Christ’s gospel of grace is our only hope as we face sin and suffering.

Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Headed

Embracing Christ doesn’t stop a fallen world from falling on us—we still face suffering. And embracing Christ doesn’t yet end our battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil—we still wrestle against sin. So, how do we learn to relate the gospel to life? How *does* theology relate to biblical counseling? How do we develop a comprehensive and compassionate biblical model for an issue like sexual abuse? We’ll address those questions and more in chapter 11: *The Rich Relevance of God’s Word*.

Chapter 11

The Rich Relevance of God's Word

Bob Kellemen

How would Paul counsel Ashley and Nate? How might he respond to their questions about hope and finding answers?

Perhaps we picture Paul stoically pondering their questions, fingertip to temple. Nothing could be further from the truth as Paul himself describes it. In his desire to care for souls, Paul struggles to the point of weariness, labors to the point of exhaustion, and agonizes like an Olympic wrestler. The whole time he's clinging to Christ's supernatural power working mightily within him (Colossians 1:29-2:1). Paul models for us counseling that is passionate and compassionate, other-centered and Christ-dependent. That's an essential reminder in the midst of two chapters where we're wading through heady stuff like "exegesis" and "academic theology."

Or, maybe we picture Paul swiftly rattling off "four principles for overcoming sexual abuse." No. When people asked Paul, "Where do we turn for wisdom for life?" he responded with an infinite answer in one word: "*Christ!*" It was this Christ-centered worldview that led the Biblical Counseling Coalition to explain gospel-centered counseling as:

We point people to a person, Jesus our Redeemer, and not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transforming power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people's hearts, not in any human system of change. People need a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus, not a system of self-salvation, self-management, or self-actualization. Wise counselors seek to lead struggling, hurting, sinning, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are available only in Christ.⁹

Pie-in-the-sky? Too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good? That's what the Colossians were being told. And it's what the world tells us today. The gospel might be good for "spiritual

stuff,” for heaven, but for life today you need Christ+, the gospel+, Scripture+, Christianity+ the world’s wisdom.

Paul, like John, counters this deficient worldview by pointing people to the all-sufficient Christ who not only offers the amazing grace of eternal life, but also the amazing grace of life lived to the fullest—*today* (John 10:10). This Jesus does not make the false promise of a trouble-free life, but the hopeful promise of peace in the midst of a troubled and troubling world (John 16:33).

Having grounded the Colossians and us in the gospel, he keeps praying for them. His prayer in Colossians 1:9-14 provides a gospel-centered pattern for translating God’s truth into wisdom for relational living.

- *Academic Theology*: “Filled with the knowledge of his will.” This is the “What?” question. The Word provides our comprehensive framework for answering life’s questions.
- *Spiritual Theology*: “Through all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” This is the “So What?” question. We learn to discern from God’s Word the implications of truth for life—insights for living like Christ and for Christ in a fallen world.
- *Practical/Pastoral Theology*: “So that you may walk worthy of the Lord.” This is the “What now?” question. Yes, sanctification includes “getting used to our salvation.” But it also involves “applying our salvation” in our daily walk so our lives ascribe worth to our Lord.
- ✓ *Our Walk and Works*: “Fruitful in every good work.” Part of biblical counseling is helping people to be fruitful in their gospel walk. We help people explore how they can wisely love others in the midst of life’s temptations and trials.

- ✓ *Our Worship*: “Increasing in the knowledge of him.” Another part of biblical counseling is helping people to worship well. We help people explore how they can wisely love God in gratitude for His grace.

Explore the Scriptures by Taking Your Real-Life Questions to God’s Word: How Do We Accurately Relate God’s Truth to Our Lives?

As we apply this biblical pattern to Ashley’s life, we start by caring deeply and listening wisely. Then we take her questions and ours to God’s Word (chapter 10). As we turn to the Word, we orient our eyes with the corrective lenses of gospel focus (chapter 10). Now we’re ready to accurately relate God’s truth to our lives.

Academic Theology: Foundation—Information/Knowledge (The “What?” Question)

There is no “magic” to the order in which these types of theology are presented or studied. In reality, they can and should be blended. Related specifically to the categories of academic theology, some might contend for systematics to follow after biblical, exegetical, and lexical theology. I won’t quibble—as long as each component is valued for its contribution to the development of a theology of biblical counseling.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology involves the orderly arrangement of everything the Bible has to say about a given topic. For instance, with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), systematic theology traces God’s inspired teaching on the Spirit from Genesis 1:2 (the Spirit brooding over the waters) to Revelation 22:17 (the Spirit inviting all who are thirsty to come drink from the water of life), and everything in between.

With sexual abuse recovery, you explore this issue systematically throughout the Scriptures, organizing God’s teaching on this life issue. You use all the categories you collated and all the questions you probed, pondered, and raised—taking those to God’s Word. By taking this

systematic biblical approach, you begin to saturate your mind with the Bible's perspective on this issue. You trace God's thinking on sexual abuse from cover to cover. So when you counsel Ashley, you're looking at her life through God's eyes.

Some of the many systematic theology questions that you might ask, *and now seek to answer*, include:

- What is the Bible's mood regarding sexual abuse? How does it relate to the Bible's overarching gospel theme? What is God saying about our sinfulness and need for grace through so many "texts of terror"? How does the author regard sexual abuse? The characters? God? How did God design us to function as gendered beings? How did God design us to function sexually? How has sin marred our maleness and femaleness? What impact does redemption have on sexual abuse recovery? How do we function as relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings relative to sexual abuse recovery? In the Bible, how are people who have been sexually abused sustained, healed, reconciled, and guided?

Another strength of the systematic theology approach to biblical counseling is the ability to trace themes across the breadth of Scripture. Not every passage of Scripture screams "text of terror!" Or, "sexual abuse!" However, a great deal of Scripture, examined systematically, addresses life issues relative to sexual abuse. For example, in examining sexual abuse concepts systematically, you might explore the entire Bible's teaching on issues such as:

- Shame. Shalom. Maleness. Femaleness. Male/female relationship. Same-sex attraction. Gender. Sexuality. Voice/voicelessness. Power/powerlessness. Forgiveness. Restitution. Reconciliation. Confrontation. Grace. Healing. Sense of self. Longings and affections. Self-sufficiency. Hiding. Self-protection. Comfort. Image of God. Putting off/on.

Biblical Theology

Biblical theology involves exploring a theme, topic, issue, or question as developed in one biblical book, or by one biblical author, or even chronologically through the history of the text. With pneumatology, you might study all of John’s writing on the Spirit—moving from John’s Gospel, to 1, 2, and 3 John, and to Revelation. What theology of the Spirit does John present?

With sexual abuse recovery, you bring all your questions and concepts related to this life issue to one biblical book or author. You might study only Genesis, or you might study all five books of the Pentateuch (authored by Moses). If studying Genesis, the “texts of terror” where women are raped, abused, and controlled could be powerful passages for you to examine. And you could explore throughout Genesis concepts previously mentioned: gender, shame, shalom, maleness, femaleness, etc.

The key with biblical theology and biblical counseling issues is to saturate your mind with *the text in context*. Ask similar questions to those listed under systematic theology, but through the eyes of one author, one book, and with continual reference to the setting/purpose of the book and the culture of the day. Some of the many broad questions with biblical theology that you might ask, *and now seek to answer*, include:

- What is the book’s mood regarding sexual abuse? How does it relate to the overarching gospel theme of the book? How does the author regard sexual abuse? The characters? God? What principles do I discover about sexual abuse and related issues in this book/this author? According to this book/author, how did God design us to function sexually? How has sin marred our functioning as males and females according to this book/author? What impact does redemption have in healing from abuse according to this book/author? In this book, how do we function as relational (spiritual, social, self-aware),

rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings? According to this author, how are people sustained, healed, reconciled, and guided when abused?

As with systematic theology, in biblical theology you can study concepts, constructs, and real life issues related to sexual abuse within the context of a book/author. When studying Genesis, for instance, you might explore issues such as:

- Why didn't Adam, who was given the command to guard the garden, guard Eve? How does this relate to a woman who has been abused by a male relative? How does it relate to a male or female who tells adults of abuse but whose concerns are never heard? How did Hagar experience being forced to bear a child for Sarai and Abram (Genesis 16)? How did she experience being mistreated by Sarai? Hagar was seen and heard by no one but God. How did she find healing in being seen and heard by God and how could that relate to sexual abuse recovery? How does the Genesis theme of shalom, shame, nakedness, and hiding possibly relate to issues of sexual abuse recovery? Why does Genesis, among all books of the Bible, have so many texts of terror? What are we to make of this theme in Genesis as it relates to human depravity and deprivation and our desperate need for grace?

Exegetical Theology

Exegetical theology involves examining your theme, topic, issue, and questions in key texts by using principles of hermeneutics and methods of Bible study to understand God's teaching regarding this concept. With exegetical theology and pneumatology, you might choose to do in-depth exegetical work in John 14-16, studying concepts such as the Spirit as the Comforter/Counselor, the guiding and teaching ministry of the Spirit, the personhood of the

Spirit, the convicting ministry of the Spirit, and how all of this relates to the believer being sanctified in and by the Spirit.

With exegetical theology and sexual abuse recovery, you saturate your mind with one passage. You do the exegetical work of observation, interpretation, implication, and application. You seek to analyze the details of the passage while synthesizing the overall purpose of the passage. You ask similar broad questions to those suggested under systematic and biblical theology.

Specific questions you can raise for exegetical theology and sexual abuse recovery can be illustrated using 2 Samuel 13 and the rape of Tamar by her half-brother, Amnon.¹⁰ From this text in context, what do we make of the non-involvement of Tamar's father David, the unhelpful, unholy involvement of her brother Absalom, the ungodly counsel of Amnon's "friend" Jonadab, the courageous, bold, wise responses of Tamar herself, the shaping of the narrative by the author, and the inspired voice of God heard in this passage. The sampling that follows is only a speck of the possible exegetical work that can be done with this one text as it relates to sexual abuse recovery.

- How does the opening phrase, "in the course of time," set the broader context for the purpose of this passage in this book? How does David's preceding sexual sin and murder assist in understanding the purpose for the inclusion of this passage in Scripture? How is God directing our gaze to a focus on our fallen condition? How is God directing our gaze to our desperate need for the Greater David? How are we to interpret Amnon's "falling in love"? How is Tamar's beauty used against her and what impact might this have upon her sense of self? How should Amnon have handled his frustration and depression? How should Jonadab have counseled his friend? Why the repeated use of "love" and "do"?

How does the repeated use of “my sister” and “my brother” impact our interpretation and application of this passage? Where did Tamar, especially given the culture of her day, find the strength to speak (find and keep her voice and power) so forcefully about the foolish, wicked nature of Amnon? How did she find the bold love to force him to ponder the personal consequences of his sinfulness? How does his refusal to listen to her (repeated in the text several times) relate to the voicelessness of sexual abuse victims? How does his forcing her because he was stronger than her relate to the powerlessness of sexual abuse victims? Why did Amnon then hate her so? How did his calling her “this woman/thing” impact her shame? How did his bolting the door against her impact her sense of shame? What does Tamar’s ritual grieving suggest about helping sexual abuse victims to candidly face their grief? How might Absalom’s “counsel” to “be quiet” and “don’t take this thing to heart” work against her full grieving? What, by Absalom’s negative example, can we learn about sustaining and healing a sexual abuse victim? What does it mean that Tamar lived a desolate woman and how might this relate to sexual abuse victims today? What do we make of David being furious but inactive? What do we make of Absalom’s anger, hatred, and eventual murder in terms of family members’ responses to the disgrace of sexual abuse? What do we make of David grieving the death of Amnon while never grieving the rape of Tamar?

Lexical Theology

Lexical theology involves examining your theme, topic, and questions by exploring the cultural and biblical meanings and uses of key words related to this issue. With lexical theology and pneumatology, you could study key words in John 14-16. Those might include the Greek words behind “another,” “Counselor,” “orphans,” “teach,” “peace,” “Spirit of truth,” “testify,”

“grief,” “convict,” “guilt,” “sin,” “righteousness,” “judgment,” “guide in all truth,” and “making it known.”

With the lexical theology and sexual abuse recovery, you want to perform studies of key words used in the passage. Study the meaning of the words in the culture of the day. Study how that author used that word in that book and section. Examine the meaning and usage of that word by that author and other biblical authors. Explore how the words describe God’s viewpoint. The perpetrator’s viewpoint. The victim’s viewpoint. The author’s viewpoint. Ponder what the words suggest about God’s design, human depravity, the damage done, and *Christ’s grace for our disgrace*. Probe what the words suggest about sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding for sexual abuse.

Specific lexical work can be illustrated using 2 Samuel 13.

- What does “fell in love with” mean and imply? Why did the author include “beautiful” in describing Tamar? What do “frustrated” and “haggard” mean relative to Amnon? How are we to interpret the author’s use of “shrewd” to describe Jonadab? What is the force of “grabbed”? What is the force of “don’t”? What is the meaning of “force”? Why did Tamar choose the phrase “such a thing should not be done in Israel”? What might the cultural context be for this phrase? What do we make of the repeated use of “don’t”? What is the meaning of “wicked”? How does this meaning help us to conceptualize the evil of sexual abuse? What did Tamar mean by “what about me”? What did she mean by “how could I get rid of my disgrace”? Culturally, what did this imply? How can “disgrace” help us to understand the hideous consequence of sexual abuse? What did Tamar mean by “what about you”? What does “wicked fools in Israel” mean and what does it say about the evils of sexual abuse? How do these words from Tamar help us to

glimpse the human author's and the divine Author's view of sexual abuse? What does "he refused to listen" mean and imply? What does "he was stronger than she, he raped her" mean and imply? What does "he hated her with intense hatred" mean and imply? What does the curt, "get up and get out" mean and imply? What does the repeated use of "he refused to listen to her" mean and imply? What does "weeping aloud" say about grieving sexual abuse? What does "be quiet" mean and imply? What does "don't take this thing to heart" mean and imply? Is Absalom's hate the same word for Amnon's hate? Is Absalom's word for "disgrace" the same as Tamar's word for it?

Textual Theology

By textual theology, I'm describing a bridge between academic theology and spiritual theology. In textual theology, you stop. Think. Ponder. Connect the dots. Synthesize.

Too often the proverbial "missing the forest for the trees" can occur with academic theology. Contextual theology helps you to relate your findings together. You connect your findings to the categories you identified in step one, to the overarching gospel theme of the Bible from step two, and to the categories you utilized in step three. What have you seen? What do you make of this? What preliminary principles and patterns are you starting to sense?

With pneumatology and textual theology, you might conclude the study of John 14-16 with a summary that the Holy Spirit is our divine Counselor, Mentor, and Discipler. Out of that big picture, many specific interpretations and applications could begin to flow with spiritual theology and practical theology.

With sexual abuse recovery and textual theology, various big picture conclusions might arise. For instance, with the plethora of texts of terror in Genesis, you might begin to surmise that one result of the fall is Satan's ongoing attack on trinitarian image bearers. We are *male and female*

image bearers, and sexual abuse attacks the core of our masculinity and femininity. Our sin, including sexual sin, which is sin against the body and against the soul (a soul that is a feminine or masculine soul) causes alienation from God, separation from one another, and dis-integration from self. Genesis, with its repeated portrait of men abusing women, reminds us that the fall attacked the core of our relational self—as spiritual, social, and self-aware beings. All of this reminds us of our need for *Christ's grace for our disgrace*. Out of that big picture, many specific interpretations, personal applications, and ministry implications could begin to arise with spiritual theology and practical theology.

Spiritual Theology: Formation—Transformation/Wisdom (The “So What?” Question)

In academic theology, you ask the “What?” question. “What does the text say about this issue?” In spiritual theology, you ask the “So what?” question. “So what difference does all my systematic, biblical, exegetical, lexical, and textual theology work make in real life as I counsel a sexual abuse victim?”

Spiritual theology is a missing step in much current theology. Theologians do at times match the stereotype of stopping at facts and missing life. They uncover truth, but fail to relate that truth to life.

At the same time, some biblical counselors might be tempted to skip academic theology and move right into spiritual theology. The frantic desire to help, to care, to speak the truth in love can motivate some to miss the truth. The result is spiritualizing and psychologizing the text; it is *not* spiritual theology. Spiritual theology builds upon the foundation of academic theology. Once you lay the foundation securely, then there are some basic processes you can move through to develop a spiritual theology of any life issue.

Ask Relevant, Relational Questions

First, ask relevant, relational questions of the text, and of the data from the text derived from academic theology.

- What was it like for Tamar to experience her brother's brutality? Hatred? Betrayal? What might have happened had Amnon's friend provided godly counsel? Why did David remain angry yet inactive? What was it like for Tamar to remain silent in Absalom's home? In her culture, what was her shame like? What might have brought her healing? How might these insights into the biblical text translate to insights for living today? How does this text shout our need for redemption? What biblical counseling principles might be suggested by these insights?

Use Your Imagination: Utilize Relevant Biblical Language

Often we speak of "making the Bible relevant." The Bible *is* relevant. We make it boring and irrelevant. We need to translate our academic theology categories back into the real and raw language of Scripture. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What powerful images have the scriptural authors used? What effective word pictures can I use to translate those images to our times? How can I creatively capture what I have learned about this issue?

Develop Biblical Categories

You entered academic theology armed with some preliminary categories. By using the hermeneutical spiral, those categories morph, grow, and deepen. Some possible sexual abuse categories from your academic theology might include:

- Grace for disgrace. Gender. Shame. Betrayal. Silence. Voicelessness. Powerlessness. Inactivity. Revenge. Maleness. Femaleness. Ungodly counsel. Anger. Love/lust. Love/hatred. Objectification of women. Beauty for ashes. Sexual bondage.

Explain the Data of People’s Lives Using the Biblical Categories

This final stage of spiritual theology begins to pave the way for transitioning into practical/pastoral theology. You now want to make use of your relevant, creative, real, raw biblical categories and relate them to the hurting person you are counseling.

- How does my understanding of her shame, of her sexual identity as a female, of her self-trust, help me to understand her? How does my understanding of biblical gender and maleness help me to direct him to God for healing? How does my understanding of self-protective covering and hiding help me to expose any lies she is believing? How does my understanding of biblical reconciliation help me to empower him to forgive graciously and love boldly?

Practical/Pastoral Theology: Friendship—Application/Love (The “What Now?” Question)

Practical or pastoral theology addresses the “What now?” question. It asks, “Given the truth related to life that I have uncovered in academic and spiritual theology, what do I do with it now? What difference does it make for me today as I minister to a sexual abuse victim? Pastoral theology translates *content to compassionate competence*. It moves from academic and spiritual theology to spiritual friendship. It applies truth to life by speaking the truth in love through relationship informed by depth of insight.

State Your Preliminary Theological Diagnosis: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation

At this stage, you organize your academic and spiritual theology work. You can use the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation *theology of life* categories integrated with the

relational, rational, volitional, emotional, and physical *theology of image bearers* categories.

Based upon your biblical findings, what preliminary biblical counseling model (creation/people, fall/problems, redemption/solutions, consummation/final hope) can you propose for sexual abuse recovery?

CFRC Relationally: Spiritual, Social, Self-Aware

You'll want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of our *relational* nature as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God's original design of the soul relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design spiritually, socially, and as a self-aware being? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification relate to mature responses as a spiritual, social, and self-aware victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim become a victor in Christ? How does Christ's grace heal the disgrace of sexual abuse? How does a sexual abuse victim see God as a protective heavenly Father if their earthly father perpetrated the sexual abuse (spiritual being)? How does a sexual abuse victim begin to trust others again when betrayed by one who should have been most trustworthy (social being)? How can a sexual abuse victim begin to find shalom when they have been shamed (self-aware being)? How can our final hope of eternal healing promote Christ-centered hope today?

CFRC Rationally: Images and Ideas

You'll want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of our *rational* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God's original design of the human mind relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a rational being who thinks in images and ideas? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification relate to mind renewal as a

victim of sexual abuse? How can the victim of sexual abuse see them self as a child of God—a saint and a son/daughter? How does Christ’s truth heal the evil deceits and satanic lies associated with sexual abuse? How does a sexual abuse victim see life—past, present, and future—from God’s perspective?

CFRC Volitionally: Purposes/Goals/Motivations and Actions/Behaviors

You’ll want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of our *volitional* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of the human will relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a volitional being who purposes and acts? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification relate to mature motivations, interactions, and actions as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse choose to love again, trust again? How does the Spirit’s power enable a sexual abuse victim to love boldly and confront graciously? How does a sexual abuse victim choose life again—choosing to live a God-sufficient, other-centered, non-self-protective life?

CFRC Emotionally: Responses and Reactions

You’ll want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of our *emotional* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of human emotions relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as an emotional being? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification relate to mature emotional responses and reactions as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse learn to handle emotions maturely? How does the Father’s comfort heal the damaged emotions of a sexual abuse victim?

CFRC Physically

You'll want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of our *physical* nature as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God's original design of humans as physical beings relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a physical being whose body and soul are united, who is one holistic "person," and whose body/soul complex has been abused? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification relate to the mature yielding of the members of the body (Rom. 6) to God as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse learn to be a pure sexual being? How does a victim of sexual abuse learn to be a mature male or female?

Outline Your Preliminary Treatment Plan: Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding

You can use the *theology of biblical counseling* as one way to organize your treatment plan. Based upon your biblical findings, what preliminary biblical counseling model can you propose that relates to the issue of sexual abuse recovery?

Outline Sustaining Intervention Implications

You'll want to ask and begin to answer sustaining questions such as the following. How do I courageously enter the black hole of sexual abuse victims redirecting them to Christ and the Body of Christ? How do I sustain the sexual abuse victim's faith, hope, and love so he/she experiences comfort from Christ and communion with Christ? How do I empathize with the sexual abuse victim so she/he knows it's normal to experience doubts, despair, disgrace, and desolation? How do I listen to the sexual abuse victim's voice? How do I hear the sexual abuse victim's earthly story of disgrace? How do I enter the agony? How do I climb in the sexual abuse victim's casket of darkness?

Outline Healing Intervention Implications

You'll want to ask and begin to answer healing questions such as the following. How do I help the sexual abuse victim to find grace—God's prescription for their disgrace? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to perceive that God is caring even when people are horrendous? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to experience faith, hope, love, and wholeness? How do we listen together for and to God's voice? How do we hear and apply God's eternal story of grace? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to embrace God who hears, sees, and embraces him or her? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to explore a renewed faith perspective? How can I be a champion who celebrates the resurrection with the sexual abuse victim?

Outline Reconciling Intervention Implications

You'll want to ask and begin to answer reconciling questions such as the following. How do I help the sexual abuse victim to ponder the holy love and justice of God as God looks at the abuser? How do I gently and lovingly expose any possible self-protective, sinful responses to sexual abuse? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to see that God is gracious and forgiving even when he or she clothes, covers, runs, and hides? How do I provide loving wisdom that reconciles the sexual abuse victim to become a victor in Christ who faces nakedness, rejects coverings, receives God's grace-garments, and finds beauty for ashes so he or she can offer Christlike love to a desolate world? How do I help the sexual abuse victim to become a victor in Christ who confesses that it is horrible to run from God, but wonderful to return to celebrate His grace, and awesome to share His forgiveness?

Outline Guiding Intervention Implications

You'll want to ask and begin to answer guiding questions such as the following. How do I understand and describe the spiritual dynamics of shame and self-covering to expose root causes

that the sexual abuse victim can put off to become a victor in Christ who puts on God-sufficiency and other-centered living? What will mature love look like for this person as he or she moves from victim to victor? How can I help the sexual abuse victim to move to victory in Christ by cooperating with God's supernatural resurrection power in creating beauty for ashes?

Examine Past and Current Biblical Research on This Life Issue: How Do We Humbly Respect the Wisdom of Others?

While we would be *lazy* if we avoided doing our own hard work of academic, spiritual, and pastoral theology; we would be *arrogant* if we avoided studying the contributions of others. I recommend that we examine past biblical research on sexual abuse recovery (from church history) as well as current biblical research (contemporaries in the discussion).

Historical Theology: Forebears—Validation (The “What Then?” Question)

We are not the first generation to explore the Scriptures to develop biblical models of care. If my findings have *no* support in church history, then I will want to ponder why this is. While Scripture is inspired, *my interpretations and applications of Scripture are not inspired.*

As you explore the contributions of predecessors in church history who studied this topic, you want to analyze this data in light of your biblical interpretations. As you analyze the data, you will want to do the following.

Discern What Further Questions Are Suggested That You May Want to Take Back to the Text for Further Study

Ask, “In light of my study of church history, what new issues do I need to study? What findings contradict my biblical interpretations? Do these suggest any faulty interpretation on my part? Their part? What findings confirm my biblical interpretations?”

Determine What to Alter in Your Views

Ask, “What do I want to re-study? What might I want to change? What might I want to add? Analyze this data in light of your biblical interpretations and evaluate your biblical interpretation in light of this data.

Current Theology: Colleagues—Validation (The “Who Else?” Question)

Just as others before us have studied matters of the soul, so also many of our colleagues are doing the same today. It would be equally arrogant for any of us to assume that we have the final word, only word, or even the best word on how to relate truth to life. Therefore, I suggest the identical model for using the contributions of our contemporaries that I suggested for using the contributions of our predecessors.

Evaluate Descriptive Research Regarding This Life Area: How Do We Use Research as a Catalyst for Deep Thinking?

I believe that the creation mandate in Genesis 1 legitimizes the role of *descriptive psychological research* that examines and quantifies human reactions and responses. So I recommend that we *examine and evaluate* the descriptive psychological research being done regarding sexual abuse—often categorized currently under the label of post-traumatic stress disorder. I am *not*, under this header, highlighting the evaluation and examination of *prescriptive secular psychology theory*.

When evaluating descriptive research, I suggest that we analyze this data in light of our biblical interpretations. Ask, “What further questions are suggested that I may want to take back to the text for additional study? What descriptive research findings seem to contradict my interpretations of the biblical data? Do these suggest any faulty interpretations on my part? Do they suggest any faulty research on their part?”

Then, determine what to revise in your views, asking, “What do I need to re-study? What might I want to change? Add? Improve?” Assess this data in light of your biblical interpretations and evaluate your biblical interpretation in light of this data.

Synthesize Your Findings: How Do We Develop a Relevant *Working Model* of Biblical Counseling for This Life Issue?

You are ready to build a working model. Likely, you already built a substantial preliminary model after your work in academic, spiritual, and practical/pastoral theology. Now you implement any new conclusions you have drawn after your study of church history, contemporaries, and descriptive research.

Notice that even now it is a “working” model. No conclusions we make this side of heaven are final. None are *the perfect model*. Still, given all the biblical work and research, you can have humble confidence in your working model. God has truly given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

It would take a book to outline how I would synthesize my study for sexual abuse recovery—and that would be giving you a fish rather than teaching you to fish. I’ll offer you instead:

- An outline suggesting final steps toward moving from your preliminary model to a working model.
- A working model—*Figure 1*.
- A detailed illustration of how I used these insights to engage with Ashley and Nate which you can find in *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes*.¹¹

Develop a Biblical Counseling Theology of This Life Issue: A Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation Biblical Counseling Diagnosis

Organize your thinking around the following categories:

- What was God’s original design (creation/people) for us in this area?

- How has sin (fall/problems) marred that design for us in this area?
- How has Christ's grace returned us to dignity and brought healing (redemption/solutions) in this area?
- How can our future hope of glory impact our current journey with Christ (consummation/future hope) in this area?

Develop a Biblical Counseling Methodology for This Life Issue: A Biblical Counseling Intervention/Treatment Plan

Organize your thinking around these biblical counseling categories:

- What does biblical sustaining look like as I minister to people facing this life issue?
- What does biblical healing look like as I minister to people facing this life issue?
- What does biblical reconciling look like as I minister to people facing this life issue?
- What does biblical guiding look like as I minister to people facing this life issue?

Where We've Been and Where We're Headed

For too long we've exhorted people to counsel biblically without providing in-depth practical equipping in how to do so. My prayer is that chapters 10 and 11, along with this entire book, will *begin* a process in all our lives where we increasingly gain *confidence* in God's Word for life in a broken world and where we increasingly grow in our *competence* in applying Christ's changeless truth to gospel-centered life change.

Figure 1

**Biblical Counseling for Sexual Abuse Recovery
“Grace, God’s Prescription for Our Disgrace”**

**The Gospel for Our Suffering: The Horrors of Sexual Abuse That We Have Suffered
God Is Caring Even When People Are Horrendous**

Biblical counselors courageously enter the black hole with sexual abuse victims redirecting them to Christ and the Body of Christ to sustain and heal their faith, hope, love, and peace so they experience comfort from Christ and communion with Christ.

Biblical Sustaining: “It’s Normal to Experience Doubts, Despair, Disgrace and Desolation”

Listen to Your Spiritual Friend’s Voice
Hear Your Spiritual Friend’s Earthly Story of Disgrace
Enter Your Spiritual Friend’s Agony
Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Current Painful Perspective
Be a Comforter Who Enters the Black Hole/Climbs in the Casket—Empathy

Biblical Healing: “It’s Possible to Experience Faith, Hope, Love, and Wholeness”

Listen Together to God’s Voice
Hear God’s Eternal Story of Grace
Encourage Your Spiritual Friend to Embrace God
Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Renewed Faith Perspective
Be a Champion Who Celebrates the Resurrection—Encouragement

**The Gospel for Our Sin: The Sin of Our Self-Sufficient/Self-Protective Responses to Sexual Abuse
God Is Gracious Even When I Clothe, Cover, Run, and Hide**

Biblical counselors understand the spiritual dynamics of shame and self-covering and discern root causes of spiritual alienation, social separation, and self dis-integration, providing loving wisdom that reconciles and guides sexual abuse victors to face their nakedness, reject their coverings, receive God’s grace-garments, and find beauty for ashes so they can offer Christlike love to a desolate world.

**Biblical Reconciling: “It’s Horrible to Run from God, Wonderful to Return to Celebrate His Grace,
and Awesome to Share His Forgiveness”**

Watch Your Spiritual Friend’s Pattern of Relating
Lovingly Expose Your Spiritual Friend’s Earthly Story of Self-Covering
Gently Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Current Protective Perspective
Enlighten Your Spiritual Friend to Grace—Received and Given
Be a Care-Fronter Who Risks Offense—Exposure

Biblical Guiding: “It’s Supernatural to Love by Clinging to Christ to Create Beauty for Ashes”

Look Together for Christ’s Grace-Focused Renewal Process
See God’s Eternal Story of Grace
Empower Your Spiritual Friend to Trust God
Equip Your Spiritual Friend to Take Risks for God
Encourage Your Spiritual Friend to Stir Up the Gifts of God
Be a Coach Who Trains the Heart—Empowerment/Equipping

Endnotes

¹I develop Ashley's story and a biblical counseling response in Robert Kellemen, *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

²Robert Kellemen, *Soul Physicians: A Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2007), 29-57.

³Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

⁴Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Revised and Expanded Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005). Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

⁵For an example of past Christian responses to sexual abuse, see Robert Kellemen, *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 92-95.

⁶See Kellemen, *Soul Physicians*.

⁷See Kellemen, *Soul Physicians*.

⁸See Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2007).

⁹The Biblical Counseling Coalition Confessional Statement can be accessed at:
<http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/about/confessional-statement/>.

¹⁰For a detailed examination of 2 Samuel 13 and sexual abuse recovery see Robert Kellemen, *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

¹¹Ibid.