

The Ancient Paths of Christian Soul Care

Timeless Truth for Our Changing Times



©

2025

By

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Introduction

On Being Church History-Informed

God tells us in Jeremiah 6:16 to,

“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

It’s fascinating that we find rest for our souls in the ancient paths of soul care.

This reminds us of the New Testament truth from Hebrews 12:1 about the “great cloud of witnesses” who teach us how to “run with perseverance the race set out before us.” We find spiritual direction, wisdom, strength, motivation, and encouragement from Christ-followers who have gone before us.

In the spirit of Jeremiah 6:16 and Hebrews 12:1, I’ve produced this free forty-eight-page PDF on:

The Ancient Paths of Christian Soul Care: Timeless Truth for Our Changing Times.

Church History-Informed Biblical Counseling

In this church history-informed resource:

- We examine ancient, historical Christian pastoral soul care to see what our 50-year-young modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement can learn from the ancient paths of 2,000 years of church history.

My History with Church History

In [6 Biblical Counseling Convictions](#), I describe my approach to biblical counseling as:

- *Gospel-Centered/Christ-Centered, Theologically-Saturated, Relationship-Focused, Church History-Informed, Research-Aware Soul Physicians of Embodied-Souls*

I’ve not found many people who include “church history-informed” among their primary convictions about biblical counseling. What is my history with church history?

When I was in seminary in the 1980s, open warfare broke out over competing counseling models. During these debates, I was struck by the fact that no one was using church history as a guide to assess modern church counseling approaches. I kept thinking:

“Surely the church has always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people to find hope and healing in Christ!”

So I started reading everything I could find (this was before Google and Amazon) on the history of soul care. For the past 40 years—that's a whole generation—I've continued that study of church history.

Sure enough, I have been able to learn a great deal about what makes biblical counseling truly biblical and what makes Christian counseling truly Christian by learning from that great cloud of historical witnesses—Christians who have been counseling one another for the past 2,000 years. That's why I believe in being church history-informed.

Table of Contents

Here's what you'll find in this eight-part series on the ancient paths of Christian soul care (note: in this free PDF resource, I rearranged the order of the original posts):

1. [*What Is "Historic," "Classic" Biblical Counseling?*](#) In Part 1, I ask and answer a series of questions. How do we date the beginning of "biblical counseling"? When did "biblical counseling" begin? What's the birthdate of "biblical counseling"? What is "historic," "classic" biblical counseling?
2. [*What Can Modern Biblical Counselors Learn from Historical Soul Care?*](#) In Part 2, we learned how the wisdom from the ancient paths (Jeremiah 6:16) of historical Christian pastoral care offers us a template for compassionate, comprehensive care and counseling.
3. [*Lingering in Lament: Life Lessons from Church History*](#). In Part 3, we learn that it is theological, biblical, and historical to patiently, relationally engage counselees in their earthly laments and to empathetically enter their painful emotions. This is psalm-like biblical counseling.
4. [*Modern Biblical Counseling Is a Shrunk Version of Historical Pastoral Care*](#). In Part 4, we learn that biblical counseling shrinks when we think like shrinks! Historical pastoral care grows our vision for comprehensive, compassionate ministry as we think and act like the Good Shepherd.
5. [*Star Wars, Star Trek, and Biblical Counseling: 4 Generations of Biblical Counselors*](#). In Part 5, we ask, "Have you done one of those genealogy DNA tests yet?" I've done two. Fascinating what I've learned about my lineage. We also ask, "What's your biblical counseling lineage, DNA, genealogy? What stream do you trace your biblical counseling to?" Of course, any and all biblical counselors first answer this question with, "I trace my biblical counseling to the Bible!" Agreed. Then, humanly speaking, are there others in the body of Christ who have influenced your approach to biblical counseling? Are you a 1st generation Jay Adams nouthetic counselor? Are you a 2nd generation David Powlison biblical counselor? Are you a 3rd generation more recently and diversely trained biblical counselor? Are you a prequel/before/historical predecessor biblical counselor tracing your lineage beyond and before America in the 1960s?

6. [*2 Ways of Thinking About Our Biblical Counseling Identity: Lineage of Training and Line of Thinking*](#). In Part 6, I introduce two different ways of thinking about our biblical counseling identity. One is historical—our lineage of training. The other is theological—our line of thinking.
7. [*18 Resources on the History of Pastoral Counseling, Soul Care, and Biblical Counseling*](#). In Part 7, I introduce you to “the democracy of the dead”—to past voices speaking to us today, by providing links to and summaries of resources on the history of Christian soul care.
8. [*3 Books on Biblical Counseling in Church History: A Treasure Hunt*](#). In Part 8, I tell the story of my history with church history. I also introduce you to my published writings on the history of soul care.

Part 1

What Is “Historic,” “Classic” Biblical Counseling?

“Classic” Biblical Counseling?

Lately I’ve seen some segments of the modern biblical counseling world labeling their approach “historic biblical counseling” or “classic biblical counseling.”

This begs the question(s):

What is “historic” biblical counseling?

What is “classic” biblical counseling?

When Did Historic “Biblical Counseling” Begin?

How do we date the beginning of “biblical counseling”? When did “biblical counseling” begin? What’s the birthdate of “biblical counseling”? We have to address these questions in order to answer the question, What is “historic,” “classic” biblical counseling?

Of course, answering these questions depends upon how we define “biblical counseling,” and upon how we trace the lineage of the personal ministry of the Word. So, let’s do that now...

1. If by “biblical counseling” we mean God’s Word, spoken by God Himself, instilling us with His wisdom to live for His glory, then biblical counseling began in Genesis 1-3 when God created and spoke to Adam and Eve.
2. If by “biblical counseling” we mean God’s people sharing God’s wisdom and truth about how to relate to God and one another, then biblical counseling continued throughout the Old Testament, [especially exemplified by the Wisdom Literature books of the Old Testament](#), and continued throughout the history of Israel and the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.
3. If by “biblical counseling” we mean the personal ministry of the Word as embodied by Christ—the Living Word—then biblical counseling [continued throughout the four Gospels](#).
4. If by “biblical counseling” we mean inspired writings relating the gospel to our relationship to God and others, then [every book of the New Testament is a biblical counseling book](#).
5. If by “biblical counseling” we mean soul care and spiritual direction provided by pastors, and one-another ministry shared by God’s people, [then historic biblical counseling is](#)

[2,000 years old](#), with a continuous history from God's people in the book of Acts until our day.

6. If by "biblical counseling" we mean the *modern nouthetic* counseling movement, [initiated by Jay Adams in the 1970s](#), and further developed by his followers since then, then biblical counseling—in its *nouthetic form*—is a very young, new, novel, modern movement of 50-ish years. Many have described this modern movement as ["the 1st generation."](#) You can read about this 1st generation of *modern nouthetic* counseling in many places, including in David Powlison's, [The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context](#).
7. If by "biblical counseling" we mean the ["2nd generation"](#) of the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement, then we're talking about the development of nouthetic counseling in the 1980s-2000s, and continuing today. David Powlison and his colleagues at CCEF and at Westminster Theological Seminary were in the forefront of this second generation, now called biblical counseling. The vast majority of 2nd generation biblical counseling leaders were influenced and trained by Powlison, CCEF, Westminster, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, and the writings of Powlison and other CCEF leaders. You can read about this 2nd generation in many places, including in Heath Lambert's work, [The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams](#). To understand something of the tensions between 1st generation nouthetic counselors and 2nd generation nouthetic biblical counselors, you can read [Donn Arms scathing review of Heath Lambert's book](#).
8. If by "biblical counseling" we mean the "3rd generation of the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement, then we are talking about a growing, diverse group. Rather than being trained predominantly by Adams (like the 1st gen), or by Powlison (like the 2nd gen), this generation is being trained and influenced by a wide array of authors, churches, leaders, and schools. Thus, they tend to see their "allegiance" less to any one modern leader such as Adams or Powlison. For one introduction to this 3rd generation, you can listen to Brad Hambrick's webinar, [A Redemptive Counseling Perspective on the History of Biblical Counseling](#).

Classic? Historic?

So, biblically and historically, the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement is **not** "historic" biblical counseling. Nor is it "classic" biblical counseling. Instead, it is a 50-year-young modern movement.

Even if someone seeks to claim the lineage of the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement, with which "classic, historic" variety are they aligning? As noted above, there has been great tension between the 1st and 2nd generations of the movement. You can read more about those tensions [here](#).

Here's the bottom line:

When speaking about biblical counseling, we should reserve modifiers like "historic" and "classic" for pastoral soul care and one-another ministry in the Bible and throughout the past 2,000 years of church history.

Defining "Biblical Counseling" in Light of Church History

We should outline "the history of biblical counseling" in light of the Bible and church history—a history that predates the "modern *nouthetic* biblical counseling movement" by at least 1,950 years.

Biblical counseling did not begin in 1970.

Biblical counseling in the church began 1,950 years earlier.

As I often say when I teach on the history of Christian soul care:

The church has always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people to find Christ's healing hope through the personal ministry of the Word.

Based upon my forty-year study of the [history of Christian soul care](#), I would offer this preliminary definition of "historic, classic biblical counseling" as:

The personal ministry of the written Word, reflected in the personal ministry of the Living Word, as practiced by pastors through pastoral soul care and spiritual direction, and as practiced by believers through one-another ministry, where we share Scripture and soul (relationship in Christ) (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8), and words and deeds (James 2:12-19; 3:13-18), as God's people embody God's truth in love (Ephesians 4:11-16) with grace (Colossians 4:6) to comprehensively (the whole congregation ministering to the whole person) and compassionately sustain, heal, reconcile, and guide saints as they experience suffering and struggle against sin on their sanctification journey.

Personally, I've come to summarize my approach with [6 Biblical Counseling Convictions](#). I further encapsulate my approach by explaining that as a biblical counselor and soul care giver, I seek to be a:

- *Gospel-Centered/Christ-Centered, Theologically-Saturated, Relationship-Focused, Church History-Informed, Research-Aware Soul Physician of Embodied-Souls.*

Church Historians on the History of "Biblical Counseling"

Has the church *really always* been about the business of biblical counseling? Rather than believing me—a biblical counselor—let's see what church historians have to say...

J. T. McNeil, perhaps the past century's preeminent historian of soul care, summarizes the historical evidence for mutual soul care and spiritual direction throughout church history.

"Lying deep in the experience and culture of the early Christian communities were the twin tasks of mutual edification (*aedificatio mutua*) and fraternal correction (*correptio fraternal*). In numerous passages (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; just to list a few) we cannot fail to see the Apostle Paul's design to create an atmosphere in which the intimate exchange of spiritual help, the mutual guidance of souls, would be a normal feature of Christian behavior" (McNeil, 1951, [*A History of the Cure of Souls*](#), p. 39).

Where McNeil focused upon mutual lay care, Charles Kemp highlights pastoral care.

"There has apparently never been a time or place where individuals did not seek out religious leaders for personal help for: sustaining comfort, guidance and counsel, reconciliation through forgiveness and assurance, and healing or spiritual health. The process can be traced from the Old Testament to Christ and the Apostles in the New Testament to the early Church to the medieval Church to the Reformation and up to our own day" (Kemp, [*Physicians of the Soul: A History of Pastoral Counseling*](#), 1947, p. 3).

With eloquence befitting the beauty of historical pastoral care, William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle reveal something of the breadth of historical pastoral ministry through personal care.

"The Christian ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, has been exercised on innumerable occasions and in every conceivable human circumstance, as it has aimed to relieve a plethora of perplexities besetting persons of every class and condition and mentality. Pastors rude and barely plucked from paganism, pastors sophisticated in the theory and practice of their profession, and pastors at every stage of adeptness between these extremes, have sought and wrought to help troubled people overcome their troubles. To view pastoral care in historical perspective is to survey a vast endeavor, to appreciate a noble profession, and to receive a grand tradition (Clebsch and Jaekle, [*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*](#), 1964, p. 1).

Clebsch and Jaekle (1964, p. 4) further defined pastoral care or the cure of souls as historically always having involved:

"Helping acts done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns."

E. Brooks Holifield summarizes the history of the extensive personal counseling ministry of pastors.

“The Christian clergy has been a talkative lot. But for almost twenty centuries they have spent more time listening to people than preaching to them. As early as the second century, they began to write letters and treatises instructing one another about spiritual direction and consolation, repentance and discipline, grief and growth. They designated their task as ‘cure of souls,’ and so voluminous were their prescriptions that by the seventeenth century it was difficult to find an original cure for a wounded spirit (Holifield, 1983, [*A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*](#), p. 15).

Holifield illustrates his point about the plethora of pastoral counseling materials produced throughout church history. He quotes a seventeenth-century pastor who apologized for writing yet another manual on the cure of soul, suggesting that everything that could be said perhaps already had been written!

Ignoring “the Great Cloud of Historical Witnesses”

Sadly, we have lost respect for the great cloud of historical witnesses.

Thomas Oden, through his historical research insights, explains how we tend to focus almost exclusively on modern approaches to pastoral care and counseling, rather than learning from church history.

“It is well known that classic Protestant evangelical teachers made frequent and informed references to the ancient Christian pastoral writers. Calvin was exceptionally well grounded in Augustine, but was also thoroughly familiar with the texts of Cyprian, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Leo, and Gregory the Great. Not until the late nineteenth century did the study of ancient pastoral writers atrophy among Protestant pastors” (Oden, 1987, [*Classical Pastoral Care, Vol. 1” Becoming a Minister*](#), p. 1).

“The preaching and counseling pastor needs to know that current pastoral care stands in a tradition of two millennia of reflection on the tasks of soul care. The richness of the classic Christian pastoral tradition remains pertinent to ministry today. The laity have a right to competent, historically grounded pastoral care. The pastor has a right to the texts that teach how pastors have understood their work over the centuries. Modern chauvinism has falsely taught us a theory of moral inferiority: that new ideas are intrinsically superior, and old patterns inferior. This attitude has robbed the laity of the pastoral care they deserve, and the ministry of the texts that can best inform the recovery of pastoral identity” (Oden, 1987, [*Classical Pastoral Care, Vol. 3: Pastoral Counsel*](#), p. 4).

The loss of connection to church history and the history of the care of souls was vividly illustrated in an article by Thomas Oden in 1980. Of that article, Ian Jones notes:

“Oden studied the frequency of references to the classical pastoral tradition in the works of seven nineteenth-century pastoral care writers, representing six

denominations. He found over 150 references to ten classical pastoral writers: Cyprian, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Richard Baxter, George Herbert, and Jeremy Taylor. Turning to the twentieth century, Oden examined seven pastoral care writers. Not one of these authors referenced a single work from the classical pastoral care tradition. Where, then, were these writers turning for authoritative sources in pastoral care and counseling? Oden found 330 references in these modern writings to Freud, Jung, Rogers, Fromm, Sullivan, and Berne. Over 1,800 years of wisdom and instruction on pastoral care and counseling had disappeared” (Jones, Unpublished ETS Paper, 2012).

“The Democracy of the Dead”

G. K. Chesterton explains the need for a church history understanding of “biblical counseling” when he observes that:

History and tradition are democracy extended through time. History gives “votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead.” It refuses to submit to the small and arrogant elite “who merely happen to be walking around.” (Chesterton, [*Orthodoxy*](#), p. 3).

The Bible explains the need for a church history understanding of “biblical counseling.” Living in a generation without answers, facing abuse from every direction, pending destruction crouching around the corner, Israel desperately needed to heed God’s counsel.

“Stand at the crossroads and look; *ask for the ancient paths*, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16).

God pictures His people as lost travelers on a life-and-death journey. Confronting a fork in the road, they are to stop to ask directions because the ancient markers are overgrown and need to be searched again.

But who should they consult? Their fellow travelers find themselves just as blinded by their corrupt culture. Reminiscent of the words of Moses, they are to, “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deuteronomy 32:7).

If they are humble enough to seek wisdom from the former generations and discover what their ancestors learned, then they will find rest for their souls—soul care. Unfortunately, in their arrogance they say, “We will not walk in it” (Jeremiah 6:16).

A Forgotten Art: Reclaiming Our Historic Mantle of Mutual Biblical Counseling

Are we so different? In swiftly changing times, as we desperately search every which way for spiritual solutions:

- We seem to lack respect for the traditional time-tested ways in which God's people of the past have dealt with personal problems.
- We prefer the latest trends and newest fads.
- We tend to focus almost exclusively on defining and learning "biblical counseling" from literature in just the past fifty short years.

All the while we could be drinking deeply from the rivers of historic Christianity; feasting from the root system of Christianity. The history of Christian soul care and spiritual direction provides a spiritual root system deep enough to withstand high winds and parching drought so that our souls can be nourished and our spiritual lives can flourish.

By following in the footsteps of our predecessors in the faith over the past 2,000 years, we can reclaim the ancient gifts of soul care and spiritual direction, restore the forgotten arts of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding, and experience a reformation in how we minister to one another through speaking and living gospel truth in love—historic, classic biblical counseling.

Part 2

What Can Modern Biblical Counselors Learn from Historical Soul Care?

My Story

I love history. I love church history. I love the history of Christian pastoral care and counseling.

For over a quarter-century, I taught a course on *The History of Christian Soul Care*. I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on [the history of Martin Luther's spiritual care](#). I've written [three books on the history of Christian soul care](#).

God's Story in Church History

Studying church history exposes our modern blind spots and our arrogant assumption that somehow we alone have cornered the market on understanding and applying God's truth. G. K. Chesterton said it poetically.

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes—our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around.”

History teaches. History humbles. That's why I encourage all of us in our 50-year-young modern biblical counseling movement to look to that great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) throughout 2,000 years of church history (see [here](#) and [here](#)). That's why I describe my model of biblical counseling, in part, as “[church history-informed](#).”

How might our modern biblical counseling movement benefit if we returned to the history of Christian pastoral care and counseling?

- Wisdom from the ancient paths (Jeremiah 6:16) of historical Christian pastoral care offers us a template for compassionate, comprehensive care and counseling.
- Historical pastoral care provides a four-dimensional model of comprehensive, compassionate care. Understanding the history of pastoral care helps us avoid a one-dimensional mindset that mistakenly acts as if pastoral counseling is primarily about confronting sin.
- Historical pastoral care models how to provide shepherding care for saints who suffer in our sinful world and who struggle against sin on our sanctification journey.

A Word of Caution

When God commanded His people to look to the ancient paths, they stubbornly and haughtily proclaimed, “*We will not listen!*” (Jeremiah 6:17).

Let’s not be like them. Let’s not say,

“Our modern approach is never one-dimensional. We always proclaim and practice a perfectly balanced approach of comprehensive, compassionate care. We do not need any corrective counsel from church history.”

Instead, let’s listen humbly to the most obscure of all classes—our spiritual ancestors—the democracy of the dead. As modern biblical counselors, let’s learn from ancient pastoral care givers.

The DNA of the Modern Nouthetic Biblical Counseling Movement

I am grateful for Jay Adams. In an era where some segments of the church were ignoring sin, Adams called on the church to provide nouthetic counseling, which he often defined as *confronting sin out of concern for change*. Adams was not shy to decry the irony of secular counselors like Mowrer and Menninger asking the church, “Whatever happened to sin?”

While Adams did more than counsel about sin, and while the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement does more than counsel about sin, confronting sin is embedded in the DNA of modern biblical counseling. For example, In 2013, David Powlison penned an intriguing article, *Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair*. Powlison explained that he had first written about “idols of the heart” in 1991 in order to expand the nouthetic counseling model beyond the idea that “sin is more than behavior.” Powlison also explained that he was disappointed that “idols of the heart” took on a life of its own as people moved in “introspective directions” and went on “idol hunts” in their own lives and in the lives of their counselees.

Was this overreaction of “idols of the heart” almost predictable given the DNA of the modern movement? Was this overapplication due, in part, to the very DNA of the modern nouthetic counseling movement and its stated focus on confronting sin out of concern for change?

You might be reading along at this point and be thinking, “*Bob Kellemen! How dare you suggest that the modern nouthetic counseling movement has confrontation of sin embedded in its DNA!*”

Well, don’t believe me. Believe Heath Lambert in his dissertation/book, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*. Read many sections, including pages 57-60, where Lambert specifies areas where he saw deficits in the biblical counseling movement’s compassionate counseling of sufferers. Written a mere fourteen years ago, it may be a tad naïve to assume that in just over a decade we have all overcome every shortfall in our approach to counseling and suffering.

The Progressive Sanctification of Biblical Counseling

Humbly learning from church history keeps us from a defensive posture where we reject even the possibility that our current counseling approach might be in need of progressive sanctification. Heath Lambert's dissertation/book, wisely taught that a movement focused on progressive sanctification in counseling, should also be a movement focused on the progressive sanctification of our counseling. I addressed this same need for the progressive sanctification of the biblical counseling movement in my book, [*Consider Your Counsel: Addressing Ten Mistakes in Our Biblical Counseling*](#).

The 2025 ACBC national conference will wisely focus on the history of soul care—for the same reason as this blog post. We both want to encourage one another to learn from church history, rather than assuming that we have cornered the market on biblical counseling. Our modern biblical counseling movement is not glorified. It is not perfected. [*We all, myself definitely included, have much to learn.*](#)

We have a multitude of areas to learn from a multitude of (historical) counselors. Being church history-informed is part of [*God's process of progressively sanctifying the modern biblical counseling movement.*](#)

The Four-Dimensional Model of Historic Pastoral Care and Counseling

Church history provides not a one-dimensional, but a four-dimensional approach to pastoral care and counseling. In Clebsch and Jaekle's classic work, [*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*](#), they outline four themes consistently practiced in 2,000 years of pastoral care and counseling: sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. In my training manual, [*Gospel-Conversations: How to Care Like Christ*](#), I picture these themes as [*four biblical compass points for biblical counseling*](#). Here is a summary of what I have learned from church history (and Scripture) about these four compass points of four-dimensional pastoral care.

Sustaining

- "It's normal to hurt."
- "Life is bad."
- The earthly story. The temporal story.
- Suffering. Grief. Lament. "The world is fallen and it often falls on us." "Suffering like a psalmist."
- Empathy.
- "Climbing in the casket" (identifying with people who, like the apostle Paul, "felt the sentence of death and despaired of life"—2 Corinthians 1:8-9).
- "Weeping with those who weep." Commiseration. Comfort.
- Patiently journeying together with sufferers.
- "Shared sorrow is endurable sorrow."
- Psalm 13; Psalm 88; Job; Ecclesiastes; Romans 8:21-27; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.

Healing

- “It’s possible to hope.”
- “God is good.”
- The heavenly story. The eternal story.
- Groaning with hope.
- Encouragement.
- “Celebrating the empty tomb” (identifying with people who, like the apostle Paul, “relied not upon ourselves, but the God who raises the dead”—2 Corinthians 1:8-9).
- “Cropping Christ back into the picture.”
- Compassionately and patiently exploring together how God’s eternal story relates to our earthly story.
- Wisely weaving God’s eternal story into our earthly story.
- Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:17-39; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.

Reconciling

- “It’s horrible to sin, but wonderful to be forgiven.”
- “Where sin abounds, grace superabounds.”
- Enlightening (Opening Eyes): Enlightening people to their sin and to God’s grace.
- Exposure: Of heart sin and of Christ’s amazing grace.
- “Dispensers of grace.”
- “Grace is God’s medicine of choice for our sin. Grace is God’s prescription for our disgrace.”
- Ephesians 4:15; Romans 5:20; Hebrews 3:7-19.

Guiding

- “It’s supernatural to mature.”
- “Fanning into flame the gift of God.”
- Equipping/Empowering.
- Wisdom for daily living and relationships.
- “Changing lives with Christ’s changeless truth.”
- Philippians 3:10; Hebrews 10:19-25; Ephesians 1:15-23; 2 Timothy 1:6-7.

Historical Soul Care: *Parakaleo* and *Noutheteo*

Church historian, J. T. McNeil, in his classic work, [*A History of the Cure of Souls*](#), explains that from the early church until our day, God’s people focused on *parakaletic* soul care for suffering and sanctification (sustaining and healing), and on *nouthetic* spiritual direction for sin and sanctification (reconciling and guiding). This focus follows God’s all-sufficient word which [highlights parakaletic care](#), using forms of the *parakaleo* word group 143 times. By comparison, the Bible uses the *noutheteo* word group only 11 times.

Being church-history informed helps us to assess whether our approach to counseling overly emphasizes the nouthetic aspects of spiritual direction to the possible neglect of the parakaletic aspects of soul care. Perhaps a few self-confrontation questions might help us to detect this a-historical de-emphasis on parakaletic soul care.

1. At times do we seem to be a tad uncomfortable with the *parakaleo* aspects of sustaining and healing in suffering?
2. Do we maintain a mindset that communicates, “You are not theological enough if you focus on *parakaletic* compassion for the suffering and patiently stay with feelings, rather than quickly moving to truth”?
3. Do we have a tendency to think, “If you empathize with people in their suffering, then you’re not getting to sin soon enough”?
4. Do we imply that parakaletic relational engagement with emotions, suffering, grief, and trauma is somehow less theological than nouthetic directive counseling?
5. Are we hyper-cautious that feelings (including grief) might take us in sinful directions?
6. Do we imply that psalm-like-care and psalm-like lamenting are somehow less theological than confrontation?
7. Do we have a tendency to think, “Commiseration is not counseling. Coming alongside of and journeying with people is good, but it is not counseling. Listening is not counseling. These are all pre-counseling. Biblical counseling is giving counsel. Counseling is talking.”
8. Do we assume that reconciling and guiding nouthetic spiritual direction are more theological than parakaletic sustaining and healing soul care?
9. Do we teach (and practice) that reconciling and guiding are more sanctification-related than are sustaining and healing?

Being church-history informed also helps us to assess whether our approach to reconciling overly emphasizes the confrontation of sin to the possible neglect of the amazing grace of Christ. This can be quite subtle. Perhaps a few self-confrontation questions might help us to detect this a-historical de-emphasis.

1. Are we perhaps more skills in the first half of reconciling and “it’s horrible to sin,” but perhaps less competent and practiced in the second half of reconciling and “it’s wonderful to be forgiven”?
2. Are we perhaps more skilled in the first half of reconciling and “idols of the heart,” but perhaps less competent and practiced in the second half of reconciling and “where sin abounds grace superabounds”?

3. Are we perhaps more skills in the first half of reconciling and “loading the conscience with guilt,” but perhaps less competent and practiced in the second half of reconciling and “lightening the conscience with grace”?
4. Are we perhaps more skills in the first half of reconciling and “exposing sin,” but perhaps less competent and practiced in the second half of reconciling and “exposing Christ’s grace”?
5. Are we perhaps more skills in the first half of reconciling and “confronting sin,” but perhaps less competent and practiced in the second half of reconciling and “dispensing grace”?

Part 3

Lingering in Lament: Life Lessons from Church History

Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding

In *What Can Modern Biblical Counselors Learn from Historical Soul Care?*, we focused on a four-dimensional model of historic pastoral care: sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding.

- **Sustaining:** “It’s normal to hurt.” “Life is bad.” The earthly story. Lament. Empathy.
- **Healing:** “It’s possible to hope.” “God is good.” The heavenly story. Hope. Encouragement.
- **Reconciling:** “It’s horrible to sin, but wonderful to be forgiven.” “Where sin abounds, grace superabounds.” “Exposing sin and dispensing grace.” Enlightening.
- **Guiding:** “It’s supernatural to mature.” “Fan into flame the gift of God.” Equipping.

Now we want to see how modern biblical counselors can apply historical pastoral soul care.

Lingering in Lament; Comfortable with Comforting

In our previous post, we learned that throughout church history, pastoral care givers and one-another ministers were comfortable with comforting. They did not see their self-identity primarily as talkers who confront others. They saw their identity as companions on a journey who came alongside (*parakaleo*) others with empathy and encouragement.

What might this look like for us as biblical counselors to linger in lament and to be comfortable with comforting? When I train counselors in lab small group settings, we’ll read Psalm 13, Psalm 88, and 2 Corinthians 1, and then we’ll discuss together:

- “Could you be patient enough to allow a psalmist to linger in their lament?”
- “Imagine that you were counseling David in Psalm 13, and he said, ‘How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?’ Would you be comfortable patiently listening to David’s lament and compassionately entering David’s soul? Or, would you fear that David was in danger of saying something that he would later have to repent of. Would you feel the need to race from listening to truth telling?”
- Imagine that you were counseling Heman in Psalm 88 and he ended with these words, ‘You have taken from me friend and neighbor—darkness is my closest friend.’ Would you be uncomfortable with Heman ending his psalm with ‘darkness is my closest friend’? Or, could you have multiple sessions where you listened to and engaged with Heman in his confusion and lament?”

- “Imagine that you were counseling the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1, and you just heard him share these words, ‘I do not want you to be ignorant about the troubles I experienced. I was under great pressure, far beyond my ability to endure, so that I despaired of life itself. Indeed, I felt like I had received the sentence of death.’ Could you linger there with Paul? Could you draw out Paul’s pain? Could you enter Paul’s emotions? Could you express empathy for Paul? Or, would you feel the need to correct Paul’s ‘feeling-based living’? Would you feel the need to confront Paul by quoting Paul back to Paul? ‘No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful and will not allow you to suffer beyond what you are able to endure.’”

If we are church history-informed, as we learned in our previous post(s), then our repertoire expands beyond nouthetic confrontation. If we practice historical pastoral care, then we can be comfortable with the patient, pain-staking, relational, emotional connection involved in parakaletic compassionate care for suffering.

If we are church history-informed, then our repertoire expands beyond truth-telling (healing) to truth-listening (sustaining). If we are not church history-informed, then we might practice a one-dimensional model that teaches, “Don’t spend a lot of time in sustaining. Don’t linger with the person exploring and entering their fallen world and their hurting soul. Instead, move rather quickly to gospel hope (healing) and telling them truth about God.” If we practice historical pastoral care, then we could linger in both realities—the truth about their suffering soul (sustaining) *and* the truth about their suffering Savior (healing).

God’s Healing for Life’s Losses

In my grief booklet, [*God’s Healing for Life’s Losses*](#), I apply this biblical/historical model of pastoral care to grief and loss using sustaining and healing.

Sustaining and Grief

- **Candor:** Being honest with ourselves about the pain of our fallen world.
- **Complaint/Lament:** Being honest with God about the pain of our fallen world.
- **Cry:** Crying out to God in utter dependence and longing—crying out for help; desperate for God.
- **Comfort:** Receiving God’s presence—the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

Healing and Grief

- **Waiting:** Waiting on God, longing for God. Enduring the chronic pain of chronic suffering.
- **Wailing:** Groaning with hope. Not denying our pain, suffering, feelings, emotions, trauma, experiences, or situation, but groaning to God while clinging to future hope.
- **Weaving:** Perceiving God’s goodness in the midst of life’s badness. Believing that though men meant this for evil, God will weave it together for good.
- **Worshipping:** Finding God even when we don’t find relief. Trusting God and serving others—in the midst of our own pain.

Care and counseling are not linear. Instead, we move back and forth between candor, complain, crying out, comfort, waiting, wailing, weaving, and worshipping.

- We are worshipping God when we candidly lament.
- We are worshipping God when we wail out with Romans 8-like groaning.
- We are weaving in biblical truth when we candidly lament how painful the evils of this fallen world are.

If we are not careful, if we are not church history-informed, then some of us might end up racing past candor, complaint/lament, crying out, comfort, waiting, and wailing. Historic pastoral care patiently journeys with the suffering person.

Perhaps we could summarize it like this:

- It is theological, biblical, and historical to patiently, relationally engage counselees in their earthly laments and to empathetically enter their painful emotions. This is psalm-like biblical counseling.

“Listening with Two Ears”: Linger Listening

I teach counselors-in-training that we “listen with two ears.” With one ear we are listening to the person’s earthly story of suffering and pain. With the other ear we are listening together to God’s eternal story of compassion, comfort, care, and hope.”

Here’s my fear. If we force in eternal truth before people are even facing their own earthly reality, then people are not actually applying God’s story to their story or to their soul. Instead, they are **generically** applying God’s story before they are even clear on their own soul and situation.

“Facing Our Suffering Face-to-Face with Christ”

I also teach that we need to “face our suffering face-to-face with Christ.” But note what that requires: that we face our suffering. We don’t race from our sufferings. We face our suffering. And only then can we truly face our suffering face-to-face with Christ.

I provide pro bono counseling and soul care for pastors. In their pain, I seek to help them to face their suffering and to explore their pain, hurts, and disappointments. Not infrequently, instead of experiencing their pain, they quickly race themselves to inviting God into generic disappointment.

“Well. Yes. This hurts. But God is so good. I don’t want to complain or focus on the pain.”

When pastors don't want to face their disappointments, pain, sorrow, suffering, and trauma, *I seek to slow them down*. I start by listening to them as they refuse to listen to their own suffering. Then, at some point I might share something like this...

"Yes. God is good. And in His goodness He invites us to lament...."

I give them biblical permission to grieve. My offer to "climb in the casket with them" often begins the process of their candidly facing their emotions, their pain, their sorrows. After several weeks of this sort of "lament work" with one pastor, he shared with me (and has given me permission to share this):

"I've been so brainwashed into thinking that it is weak to feel. For the first time, perhaps ever, I feel a freedom to feel and to invite God into my feelings, instead of stuffing my feelings. I feel the freedom to be honest with you and honest with God and honest with myself. I feel the freedom to feel weak. And for the first time, I am truly sensing God's compassion *for me*."

Here's another summary—based upon the Bible and church history:

We don't want us to force-feed God-talk into people before they actually have done real-life-talk.

How can we invite God into our feelings if we are terrified of our feelings? How can we invite God into our suffering if we are not truthfully facing our situation and our soul?

Care and Counsel Like Paul

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, Paul tells the Christians at Thessalonica:

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to give you not only the gospel, but our own souls, because you are dear to us."

Paul's pastoral care and counseling embraced truth and love. It embraced Scripture and soul. It embraced relationship and the gospel. It was never either/or. It was always both/and.

Biblical counseling that commits to patient, in-depth relational/emotional engagement is not less theological than directive counseling that races people to answers. Theological counseling follows a biblical theological anthropology that sees us as physical, emotional, volitional, rational, relational, social, self-aware, spiritual beings.

We comprehensively, compassionately engage the whole person. We don't just seek to pry open the cranium and do a content dump. We don't just seek to confront them into volitional compliance with external standards of behavioral response to the trauma of living in a fallen world. We patiently, compassionately offer them our very own souls because they are dear to us.

Care Like Historical Pastoral Care Givers

We counsel like that great cloud of historical biblical pastoral care givers when:

- We invite people to lament like the psalmists, to groan like Romans 8, and to acknowledge despair like the apostle Paul.
- We journey patiently with people as they candidly face fallen life with integrity.
- We linger and listen compassionately to their suffering and enter empathetically into their pain.
- We listen long to their story of suffering and hurt, and we invite them to listen longingly to their suffering Savior's story of comfort and hope.
- We move wisely at their pace as together we invite their Suffering Savior into their suffering soul.
- We journey together with them exploring how God's eternal story of hope impacts their earthly story of suffering.

Part 4

Modern Biblical Counseling Is a Shrunk Version of Historical Pastoral Care

“Honey, I Shrunk the Pie!”

The title for this post is meant to provoke us to think. The title is *not* meant to make us quit being biblical counselors. The title is meant to expand our biblical/historical understanding of our one-another calling.

Here’s my biblical/historical premise, point-by-point:

1. **Without realizing it, we are so integrated into our secular therapy culture and worldview that we turn every ministry encounter into counseling and talk therapy:** Modern biblical counseling is a very small slice of the much larger category of the historical pastoral care pie. Historic pastoral care/counseling has always comprehensively engaged the whole body of Christ in helping the whole person in their whole life.
2. **We’ve integrated the world’s talk therapy model into our modern biblical counseling movement:** Like the frog in the slowly boiling kettle, we are so integrated into modern, individualized, formalized secular talk therapy culture that we fail to recognize how much we model our ministry after talk therapy.
3. **Biblical counseling shrinks when we think like shrinks!** We arbitrarily limit what we can do, and what we can focus on, in biblical counseling based upon individualized secular talk therapy with their 50-minute sessions and secular standards.
4. **Historical pastoral care grows our vision as we think and act like the Good Shepherd:** By examining the history of classic pastoral care, and by contrasting it with modern biblical counseling, our eyes open so we can jump out of the boiling cultural kettle and engage in more comprehensive church-based ministry.

Ancient Church History Versus Modern Biblical Counseling Practices

Let’s develop these premises further. Because our culture is awash in one-on-one talk therapy, when we, even as Christians, think of “pastoral care” we almost always think of “pastoral counseling.”

Our mindset is,

Pastoral care = pastoral counseling.

Pastoral care = talk therapy.

Equating pastoral care with pastoral counseling is a-historical. It was not until the 1920s when Anton Boisen developed the concept of “clinical pastoral training” that pastoral care “became” pastoral counseling. Boisen did this by *integrating pastoral care and secular psychology*.

The biblical mindset is:

Pastoral care = congregational care.

Prior to the modern secular era, pastoral care was not even just what the pastor did. Instead, pastoral care was congregational care.

Historically, and biblically, pastoral care involved the pastor overseeing and equipping the entire congregation to care for the whole person in their whole life situation (Ephesians 4:11-15; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Pastors were never talk therapists; they were never primarily “biblical counselors.” They were overseers of equipping. Historically, pastoral care is not *just* what the pastor does; pastoral care is what the whole church provides to one another—pastoral care is congregational care.

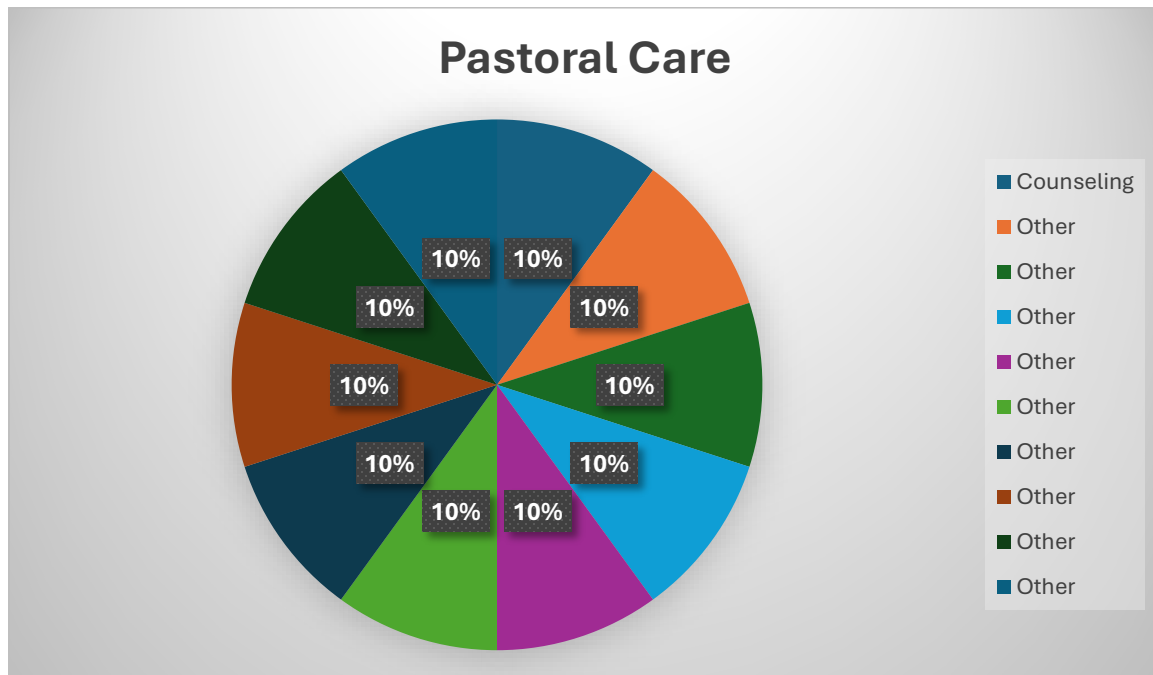
Think back to Acts 2:42-47 for the biblical history of pastoral care. The whole church ministered to the whole person—comprehensively meeting physical, social, spiritual needs. Acts 2 is simply reflective of all of the Book of Acts. Recently, I collated 31 passages (not verses, but passages) in Acts where God’s people ministered to the whole person.

Acts is simply reflective of the ministry of Jesus. I’ve [collated 102 Gospel passages \(618 Gospel verses\) where Jesus ministered to the whole person](#).

Consider how our modern approach, using a modernistic mindset, has narrowed classic pastoral care.

- **Classic Pastoral Care:** This is the ancient biblical model of comprehensive ministry where the whole congregation ministers to the whole congregation in their whole life. Instead of simply “giving counsel,” the church has always “given care” and “shared care.”
- **Modern Nouthetic Counseling:** One person confronting another person to change (confrontation out of concern for change). This is one sliver of one slice of pie.
- **Modern Biblical Counseling:** One person counseling another person who is a saint who suffers and sins. Though this expands the focus of counseling beyond confrontation, it still follows a modern model of talk therapy—a biblical counselor/therapist talks one-on-one in an office about problems. While fine; it is not equivalent to the broader ministry of pastoral care.

We might picture it like this, where pastoral counseling is simply one possible subset up a myriad of ministries involved in pastoral care:



Biblical and Historical Realities

Let's be clear on a few biblical/historical facts:

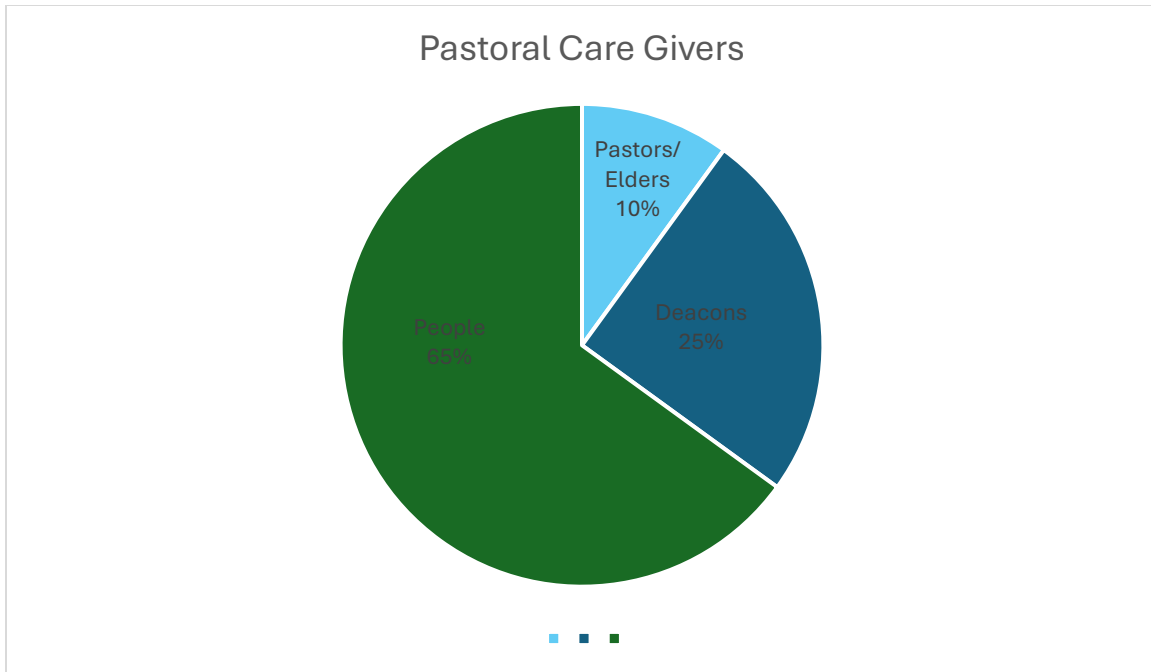
1. "Biblical counseling" is *not* a biblical term. "Biblical counseling" is *not* a church history term. "Biblical counseling" is a modern term invented just fifty years ago in response to secular talk therapy, secular psychology, secular psychiatry, and secular counseling.
2. We should not define or *delimit* ministry based upon the modern cultural term "biblical counseling." We should never limit what a pastor or a Christian brother or sister in Christ *should do or not do* based upon the modern cultural term "biblical counseling."
3. No Christian should have as their primary identity "biblical counselor." We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession (1 Peter 2:9).
4. No pastor should take as their primary identity "biblical counselor." We are pastors-shepherds-teachers-equippers (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Some Personal Illustrations

What does it look like in real life and real ministry to follow the biblical/historical model of pastoral care? Here are a few ways I've tried to reflect this historical reality.

1. **Congregational Discipleship Pastor:** When I was a pastor, I never identified as a "biblical counselor." As a "Sr. Pastor," I didn't even take on the title "Sr. Pastor." I created the novel title, "Congregational Discipleship Pastor"—because my role was to minister with the elders to equip the entire congregation.
2. **Equipping Pastor:** When I was an associate pastor, I took on titles such as, "Equipping Pastor," "Pastor of Discipleship and Counseling." I *never* wanted to be viewed as a "Christian talk therapist." I *never* wanted to limit my ministry to a 50-minute session of talk therapy.
3. **MACCD:** When I launched and led an MA program at Capital Bible Seminary, I wanted to name it, "MA in Discipleship." But the administration did not like the abbreviation of "MAD"! They also, sadly but realistically, did not think that "discipleship sold." So, we compromised, and named it, "MA in Christian Counseling and Discipleship" (MACCD). At least I was able to keep "discipleship" as a core part of the name and made discipleship *the* core focus of the entire MA. Our goal was *not* to graduate "counselors." Our goal was to graduate equippers—Christian leaders who could equip the whole congregation to minister to the whole person in their whole life situation.
4. **"Steve and Alexis":** In my book, [*Equipping Biblical Counselors*](#) (the sub-title keeps to this focus on discipling the whole congregation—[*A Guide to Discipling Believers for One-Another Ministry*](#)), I start with a chapter called, [*"More Than Counseling: Catching God's Vision for the Entire Church."*](#) In that chapter, I share a story about "Steve and Alexis." Rather than it being a story about me "counseling them" (which I did), it was a story about *becoming a church that cares*. I illustrated from our "average-size church of 275," how the entire congregation came around Steve, Alexis, and their children. Ministering to them was less about "offering biblical counseling sessions," and much more about a congregation saturated by the vision of every-member ministry and equipped to offer one-another ministry. And this one-another ministry was much more than just lay people doing lay biblical counseling; it was God's people providing comprehensive care for this hurting family.

We can picture biblical "pastoral care" as the combined ministry of the entire congregation—"congregational care." **Note:** The percentages in the pie chart are arbitrary and simply illustrative of the biblical mandate that pastors/equippers oversee and equip the church, the people of God minister to one another, and the deacons assist in the oversight of congregational care.



**Why This Is Relevant to Us Today:
“Brothers and Sisters, We Are *Not* Professional Counselors!”**

This is relevant to us today because some people are using secular standards to set false, secular boundaries around what we *should or should not do, say, or focus on* as “biblical counselors.” Who cares what the man-made boundaries are for the man-made term “biblical counselor”?

If you are an LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor), then, yes, you must follow the world’s standards and state-based licensure standards about what you can and cannot do/say/focus on as an LCPC. But brothers and sisters, we are not professionals! We are not Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor.

We *are* a royal priesthood called to comprehensively care for one another with Christ’s care. Let’s not limit what we should or should not do in ministry based upon some idealized modern definition of “biblical counseling” that is a far cry from comprehensive historic pastoral care and counseling.

A Recent Online Conversation

A recent online conversation with a new Twitter/X friend, illustrates this issue. My friend argued that we must distinguish between “broader Christian care” and “narrower biblical counseling,” and that we must not blur the lines between them. He argued that biblical counseling focuses on the sanctification of the inner person, and that meeting physical needs, addressing symptoms, and caring for practical needs, while good, is beyond the boundaries of “biblical counseling.” He further stated that,

“If biblical counseling is fundamentally a ministry of the Word, then while it should be aware of the physical realities people face, its primary role is not to directly address those physical needs but to guide people in responding to them biblically. I worry that collapsing all forms of pastoral care into biblical counseling may unintentionally blur important distinctions. If counseling is aimed at heart-level transformation through the application of Scripture, then it must remain focused on that goal.”

In response, I proposed that:

1. Historical pastoral care and counseling went far beyond talk therapy. It was a ministry of reflecting the Living Word’s ministry to people—[Christ’s comprehensive whole person ministry](#).
2. If the goal of sanctification is Christlikeness, and since Christ Himself made giving a cup of cold water to the least of these a mark of Christlike kingdom living, then comprehensive compassionate care for the whole person is not symptom relief, but Christlike care.
3. If we say that once we engage in practical care for others, that may be “ministry,” but it is no longer “biblical counseling,” then our definition of care and counseling is more like the world than like the Word. Ministry becomes “50 minutes of talk therapy.”
4. Our “biblical counseling ministry” is done as a pastor, shepherd, elder representing the church. Our “biblical counseling ministry” is done as a one-another minister representing the body of Christ. Historical pastoral care and counseling, and historical one-another ministry, never followed a secular model of talk therapy that limited us by only allowing us to talk, and not act. In fact, James 3:14-17 nouthetically confronts believers who simply speak words of peace, but do nothing to meet real needs.
5. When we’re talking as a representative of the body of Christ, marshalling the resources of the whole church to care for the whole person is exactly our calling. As soul physicians of embodied-souls, we need to look beyond a modern talk therapy model for defining what constitutes pastoral care and counseling. We need to define sanctification comprehensively as the Bible does—as Christlikeness, and Christ ministered to the whole person.

Some Biblical Reflections...and Corrections on Ephesians 4:11-16

Our secular talk therapy culture has so saturated our thinking that we even get Ephesians 4:15 wrong.

I know this may shock many of us, but Ephesians 4:15 is *not* about counseling. In fact, it isn’t even about “*speaking* the truth in love.”

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul uses the Greek word ἀληθεύω (alētheuō). It means to maintain the truth, to act truly or sincerely, to live with integrity. Rather than “speaking the truth in love,” it should be translated “living the truth in love,” or “truthing in love.” We are to embody truth

in love. Galatians 4:16 uses the same word, and once again, it should be translated not by “telling you the truth,” but by “dealing truthfully.” “Have I become your enemy by dealing truthfully with you?”

What is Ephesians 4:11-16 about?

Ephesians 4:11-16 is about shepherd-equippers equipping the congregation to shepherd one another. God’s people, overseen by shepherd-equippers, live the truth in love so the whole body of Christ builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Pastors don’t simply do the work of the ministry. Pastors equip the saints to do “the work of the ministry”/“works of service” (4:12). As the whole congregation is equipped for congregational care, then by embodying the truth in love we grow up in Christ as we build one another up in love as each part does its work (4:15-16).

Some Biblical Reflections...and Corrections on “One-Another Ministry”

Our secular talk therapy culture has so saturated our thinking that we even get “one-another ministry” wrong.

We’ve falsely made one-another ministry primarily about counseling one another. The Greek word ἀλλήλων (one another) is 100 times in 94 verses. One-third of the one another commands are about unity—getting along—how we relate to one another. One third are about loving one another. About 15% are about humility toward one another. Another 15% are miscellaneous ministries. About 4% are about speaking to one another (Eph. 4:25; 1 Thess. 4:18; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24) (and Col. 3:16 is actually not ἀλλήλων).

The vast majority of biblical usages of “one another” ministry are not about talk ministry at all. They are about action ministry, about relational ministry that goes beyond “talk therapy” and “biblical counseling” to comprehensive whole-person ministry.

A Few Sample Historical/Biblical Examples

For scores of examples of comprehensive congregational embodied-soul care, see [*Beyond the Suffering, Sacred Friendship, Counseling Under the Cross*](#). For 400 years, [*the Black Church*](#) in American consistently practiced comprehensive care for the whole person through the whole congregation. For 2,000 years, [*women soul care givers*](#) consistently practiced comprehensive care for the whole person through the whole congregation. With grieving, depressed, and hurting people, including his friend and co-minister, Melancthon, [*Luther practiced comprehensive care*](#) for the whole person through the whole congregation.

[*Spurgeon saw and treated his own depression comprehensively*](#) as an embodied-soul embedded in a congregation of care givers. The whole congregation ministered to Spurgeon, [*including his elders*](#), who insisted that Spurgeon take extended times of sabbatical in the hot springs of France.

The Bible consistently teaches, models, and commands [embodied-soul care](#). Elijah in his despondency and fear needed his soul strengthened by the Lord's presence *and his body strengthened by food, drink, and rest* (1 Kings 19:1-9). [Jesus consistently ministered to the whole person](#) in their whole life setting. The Bible consistently teaches, models, and commands that embodied-soul care [takes a congregation](#) (Acts 2, Acts 6, Ephesians 4; Galatians 6; the one-another commands).

Seeing with Old Eyes

Historical pastoral care teaches that biblical ministry is much more comprehensive than modern biblical counseling's current vision. We need the old eyes, but clear vision, of church history in order to expand our vision of what makes biblical counseling truly biblical.

1. **Pastoral Care Is Words *and* Actions:** Biblical counseling that reflects historical pastoral care will not limit itself to a model of individual talk therapy, but will follow the biblical vision of comprehensive care through words *and* actions (James 2:12-19; 3:13-18).
2. **Pastoral Care Is Multiple Means in Multiple Settings:** Biblical counseling that reflects historical pastoral care will not limit itself to 50-minute, office-based sessions, but will follow the biblical vision of comprehensive care through multiple means in multiple settings ([see Paul's comprehensive ministry](#) in Acts 18-20 as one example).
3. **Pastoral Care Is Congregational Care:** Biblical counseling that reflects historical pastoral care will not limit itself to a model of an expert therapist, but will follow the biblical vision of the whole congregation ministering to the whole person in their whole life situation (see Acts 2, 6, and the one-another commands).
4. **Pastoral Care Is Embodied-Soul Care:** Biblical counseling that reflects historical pastoral care will not limit itself to a focus on the soul and "the inner man," but will follow the biblical vision for comprehensive ministry to the whole person—to embodied-souls.

Pastoral care is Christlike comprehensive, compassionate whole person care. Maybe instead of saying, "I'm offering you biblical counseling," we say, "I'd like to share Christlike care," and we go from there...

Part 5

Star Wars, Star Trek, and Biblical Counseling: 4 Generations of Biblical Counselors

3 Generations and Before

What do Star Wars, Star Trek, and biblical counseling have in common? They each have 3 generations. They also each have predecessors. We might say they each have a “prequel.”

3 Generations of Star Wars and Before

- **1st Generation:** The 3 original Star War movies from the 1970s and 1980s.
- **2nd Generation:** The 6 subsequent Star War movies—3 prequels and 3 sequels.
- **3rd Generation:** The ever-growing myriad of movies, TV shows, comics, graphic novels, and books that exist today.
- **Prequel/Before/Historical Predecessors:** George Lucas, the creator of the Star Wars universe, has spoken many times about various sci-fi predecessors who influenced him, such as the Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials from the 1930s and 1940s.

3 Generations of Star Trek and Before

- **1st Generation:** The classic Star Trek TOS (The Original Series) from the 1960s.
- **2nd Generation:** Star Trek TNG (The Next Generation) from the 1980s and 1990s.
- **3rd Generation:** The ever-growing myriad of movies, TV shows, comics, and books that exist today.
- **Prequel/Before/Historical Predecessors:** Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek, often explained that not only did early sci-fi, especially The Twilight Zone, influence him, but also westerns. Roddenberry envisioned Star Trek as “Wagon Train to the Stars.”

3 Generations of the Modern Biblical Counseling Movement and Before

- **1st Generation:** The launch of the modern nouthetic counseling movement by Jay Adams in the 1960s and 1970s, and continuing today. NANC—the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors—was the original organization promoting nouthetic counseling. You can read about this 1st generation in many places, including in David Powlison’s, [*The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*](#).

- **2nd Generation:** The development of nouthetic counseling in the 1980s-2000s and continuing today. David Powlison and his colleagues at CCEF and at Westminster Theological Seminary were in the forefront of this second generation, now called biblical counseling. The vast majority of 2nd generation biblical counseling leaders were influenced and trained by (many earned their D.Min. in BC) Powlison, CCEF, Westminster, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, and the writings of Powlison and other CCEF leaders. During this second generation, NANC became ACBC: Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. You can read about this 2nd generation in many places, including in Lambert's work, [*The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*](#).
- **3rd Generation:** The 3rd generation of the modern biblical counseling movement is a growing, diverse group. Rather than being trained predominantly by Adams (like the 1st gen), or by Powlison (like the 2nd gen), this generation is being trained and influenced by a wide array of authors, churches, leaders, and schools. Thus, they tend to see their "allegiance" less to any one modern leader such as Adams or Powlison. For one introduction to this 3rd generation, you can listen to Brad Hambrick's webinar, [*A Redemptive Counseling Perspective on the History of Biblical Counseling*](#).
- **Prequel/Before/Historical Predecessors:** There's a reason that we call the current field of biblical counseling the *modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement*. It hasn't always existed. It's a new, 50-year-young movement. The modern movement has 1,950 years of historical predecessors in the history of Christian soul care, one-another ministry, and pastoral care. The personal ministry of the Word began in Genesis 1-3 and continued throughout the Bible. For a few introductions to this long history of pre-modern biblical counseling, see the following posts: [*What Is Historic, Classic Biblical Counseling?*](#), [*18 Resources on the History of Pastoral Counseling, Soul Care, and Biblical Counseling*](#), and [*3 Books on Biblical Counseling in Church History*](#).

Tracing Our Biblical Counseling DNA

Have you done one of those genealogy DNA tests yet? I've done two. Fascinating what I've learned about my lineage.

What's your biblical counseling lineage, DNA, genealogy? What stream do you trace your biblical counseling to?

Of course, any and all biblical counselors first answer this question with, "I trace my biblical counseling to the Bible!"

Agreed.

Then, humanly speaking, are there others in the body of Christ who have influenced your approach to biblical counseling?

1. Are you a 1st generation Jay Adams nouthetic counselor?

2. Are you a 2nd generation David Powlison biblical counselor?
3. Are you a 3rd generation more recently and diversely trained biblical counselor?
4. Are you a prequel/before/historical predecessor biblical counselor tracing your lineage beyond and before America in the 1960s?

Tracing My Biblical Counseling DNA

Physically, I have a diverse genealogical DNA. I have a lot of Romanian and Eastern European DNA. I have some German DNA. I have a lot of English-Irish DNA. According to one of the two DNA tests I took, I have a good deal of Jewish DNA.

Spiritually, as far as biblical counseling, I would put myself primarily in the prequel/before/historical predecessor DNA of biblical counseling. But I also have quite the mixture.

My Biblical Counseling Lineage

Here's a summary of Bob Kelleman's biblical counseling DNA.

1. **Bob Kelleman's 1st Generation Biblical Counseling DNA:** I came to know Christ in 1974 under the ministry of Pastor Bill Goode. Pastor Goode, who later became the NANC Executive Director, trained me and other youth in our church in nouthetic counseling. However, I never self-described as a nouthetic counselor, because early on, I saw various areas where I thought the model should be [further developed to become more biblically comprehensive](#).
2. **Bob Kelleman's 2nd Generation Biblical Counseling DNA:** Unlike the vast majority of 2nd gen biblical counseling leaders, I did not study under David Powlison. However, I had the privilege of [ministering closely with David in numerous settings](#). I have great affinity for his model and the model of CCEF. However, it is more alignment with than studying under.
3. **Bob Kelleman's 3rd Generation Biblical Counseling DNA:** Rather than studying under the 3rd generation leaders, I have had the privilege of equipping many 3rd generation leaders. I served as a biblical counseling professor at two seminaries and one Bible college; I taught adjunct at over half-a-dozen Bible colleges and seminaries; I've written a couple of books read by 3rd gen biblical counselors; etc. By God's grace, I have many younger 3rd generation biblical counselors who consider me something of a "mentor." I consider many of them to be spiritual sons and daughters.
4. **Bob Kelleman's Prequel Generation Biblical Counseling DNA:** If you force me to make a selection among these four streams of biblical counseling, then I will select this 4th stream. What human being has most influenced my approach to biblical counseling?

Though I'm grateful to so many pioneers in the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement, like Bill Goode, Jay Adams, David Powlison, John Bettler, Steve Viars, Randy Patten, Paul Tripp, Ed Welch, Mike Emlet, Elyse Fitzpatrick, Garrett Higbee, Deepak Reju, etc., I trace my lineage further back. If I were not a biblical counseling professor, I would have wanted to become a history professor. I love history. I love church history. Clebsch and Jaekle's book, [*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*](#), first introduced me to the history of what we now call biblical counseling, one-another ministry, pastoral care, pastoral counseling, soul care, spiritual direction, etc. Since then, I have spent over forty years studying the history of Christian soul care. My [*Ph.D. dissertation was on Martin Luther's pastoral counseling*](#). For over a quarter-century, I taught a graduate course on The History of Christian Soul Care. I've written [*three books on soul care in church history*](#). I trace my biblical counseling lineage to the Church Fathers, [*the Church Mothers*](#), [*Luther*](#), the [*Puritans*](#), [*the black church in America*](#), and [*many more*](#).

What Difference Does This Make?

In our modern biblical counseling conversations, we are often asking, [*What Makes Someone a Faithful Biblical Counselor?*](#) Or, what makes biblical counseling truly biblical? We frequently draw lines around lineage.

If we are not careful, we can almost become like the Corinthians. Instead of saying, "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos." We say, "I am of Jay Adams." Or, "I am of David Powlison." Or, "I am of _____" (fill in the blank with your preferred current biblical counseling leader).

I also fear that we get even more narrow, drawing the line ever more toward one "wing," or "camp," or "group," or "leader." We imply things such as,

"If you are not of Jay Adams, David Powlison, Cornelius Van Til, and if you do not ascribe to *this* document, and if you do not align with *this* group, and if you do not accept *this* definition of biblical counseling, and if you do not use these *exact* words in your description, then you are not a *true* biblical counselor."

We have become very modern/American in our line-drawing. We insist that everyone who claims the title, "biblical counselor," must be able to trace their lineage to the Mayflower of the modern biblical counseling ship, or else they are rejected and deemed outsiders to the true (modern) biblical counseling movement.

My Goal, Desire, Prayer

Perhaps today's history lesson of three *current* generations of *modern* biblical counselors, and one *historical*, 1,950-year-old generation of *pre-modern* biblical counselors can assist us toward more healthy conversations about biblical counseling.

What About You?

1. Are you a 1st generation Jay Adams nouthetic counselor?
2. Are you a 2nd generation David Powlison biblical counselor?
3. Are you a 3rd generation diversely trained biblical counselor?
4. Are you a prequel/before/historical predecessor biblical counselor tracing your lineage beyond and before America in the 1960s?

Part 6

2 Ways of Thinking About Our Biblical Counseling Identity: Lineage of Training and Line of Thinking

A Fun, Popular Post

Part 5, [Star Wars, Star Trek, and Biblical Counseling](#), was *fun* to write. According to Google analytics and to social media interactions, it was a *popular* post to read. Talking about our biblical counseling DNA and historical lineage is fun. It's an "easy" way to self-identify the *influences* on my approach to biblical counseling.

There's More to Our Biblical Counseling Identity

Consider Part 6 to be something of an *addendum* to Part 5. I want to expand on how we identify our approach to biblical counseling.

If you ask me, "Who is Bob Kellemen?" I'm not likely to only answer with,

"I'm primarily Romanian on my father's side and primarily English-Irish on my mother's side."

Unless I'm at a meeting of a genealogy society, that's not the primary way we tend to think about our identity. It's a fun way. It's one way. But it really doesn't get at, "Who am I?" Instead, it gets at, "What is my ancestry/lineage/DNA/biological/genealogical history?" Likewise, when someone asks me, "Who is Bob Kellemen as a biblical counselor?" I'm not only going to answer this question with,

*"I've been most influenced by the Bible **and** people in church history **before** the 1960s."*

That answer highlights my biblical counseling identity in terms of ancestry, lineage, genealogy. It addresses the question,

*"Historically, what human stream of biblical counseling leaders, thinkers, teachers, equippers, and mentors most **influenced** me?"*

It answers this *lineage* question with,

"I'm a biblical counselor most influenced by the theory, training, writings, approach, and model of this/these particular biblical counseling leader(s)."

Who Am I?

Imagine that we're enjoying lunch together, and you want to get to know me better. You ask me, "Who are you, Bob Kellemen?" There are a lot of ways I might answer that question.

- At some point, perhaps, I'd talk about my ancestry/DNA history.
- Likely, I'd share something about my personal history and upbringing: where I was born, my parents, my siblings.
- As the conversation continues, I'd probably talk about my current life and relationships: my wife, my kids, my grandkids, my extended family, my friends...
- If we keep talking, I'd likely share about my interests, likes, activities, what I do for fun, my hobbies, what I do for a living.
- If you're a good, interested listener, and if we keep talking, I might start sharing more about my personality: who I am, what makes me "tick," what interests me.
- If we're having a really long, intense lunch, and I feel safe with you, I might even start sharing about my dreams, concerns, fears, hopes...
- If our lunch is a seven-course meal and you're a friend I trust, I may even start talking about my beliefs, convictions, what motivates me.

It's obvious, right, that being part Romanian and part English-Irish is just one way of answering the question, "Who is Bob Kellemen?"

So also, being influenced by the Adams-stream, or the Powlison-stream, or the diverse third generation-stream, or the pre-1960s-stream is just one way of conceptualizing my biblical counseling identity.

"Who Are You As a Biblical Counselor?"

While our BC DNA or *lineage of training* is one way of thinking about our BC identity, it is not the only or even the primary way. If we're having that seven-course lunch conversation and you ask me, "Who is Bob Kellemen as a biblical counselor?" I'm going to share more than, "I'm primarily a 4th gen BCer influenced by the Bible *and* Christian soul care givers who lived before the 1960s." If I trust you and we have a safe relationship, then I'm going to go deeper than that.

While our conversation might move in a whole lot of directions, I want to keep it a little simpler by thinking about our biblical counseling identity in two primary ways.

1. A Valid Way of Conceptualizing Our BC Identity: ***Lineage of Training***
2. A Vital Way of Conceptualizing Our BC Identity: ***Line of Thinking***

Part 5 was about *lineage of training*. Here in Part 6 we're talking about *line of thinking*. This is a much more involved, detailed, and nuanced issue. It addresses questions such as:

1. What are the areas of emphasis in my theology/theory of people, problems, and solutions?
2. What are the areas of emphasis in my methodology/practice of the personal ministry of the Word?
3. What are the areas of emphasis in my epistemology/source of truth for developing my theology and methodology of biblical counseling?

Each of these questions has numerous sub-questions and categories, such as:

1. What are the areas of emphasis in my biblical counseling **theology/theory of people, problems, and solutions**?
 - **What is my biblical counseling theory of people?:** This is biblical/theological anthropology. This is about creation. How did God design us? What is our make-up: what does it mean to be relational beings, spiritual beings, social beings, self-aware beings, rational beings, volitional beings, emotional beings, physical beings, embodied-souls?
 - **What is my biblical counseling theory of problems?:** This is biblical hamartiology: the study of sin. This is about the fall of humanity into sin and its impact on us. How did sin impact who we are? What is our core problem? What is the impact of being sinned against?
 - **What is my biblical counseling theory of solutions?:** This is biblical soteriology: salvation and sanctification. This is about redemption. How does Christ save us and change us? How do we change? How do we grow in Christ?
2. What are the areas of emphasis in my **methodology/practice** of the personal ministry of the Word?
 - **What is my focus in helping people?:** As I relate to people in truth and love, do I focus on nouthetic confrontation of sin? Do I focus on parakaletic comforting of suffering? Do I focus on both?
 - **What is my journey with people like?:** As I relate to people in truth and love, do I focus on sustaining empathy? Do I focus on healing encouragement? Do I focus on reconciling exhortation and exposure of sin and grace? Do I focus on guiding empowering and equipping? Do I focus on all of these as needed by the person at the particular moment?
 - **What methods, skills, and relational competencies do I focus on as I minister to people?:** Here we're talking about a myriad of options in what we actual do in a "counseling session."

- **What is my “style” of engagement with people?:** Am I primarily a teacher/preacher and the personal ministry of the Word is like one-on-one teaching? Or, am I primarily a relater and the personal ministry of the Word is soul-to-soul connecting? Or is it a blend of both?
3. What are the areas of emphasis in my **epistemology/source of truth** for developing my theology and methodology of biblical counseling?

Let’s stop for a moment before we bullet point this question. Let’s go back to our seven-course lunch meal. We’ve gone deep if and when we get to question three. This is the, “Bob Kelleman, who are you really?” This is the, “Bob Kelleman, how do you answer questions 1 and 2 about your theology and methodology of biblical counseling?”

- **What is my source of authority for developing my theory and methodology of biblical counseling?:** This gets at all the current discussions and debates in the modern biblical counseling world. I’ve sought to address these types of questions in many places, including here: [*100 Resources for Counseling the Whole Person: The Bible, the Body, the Embodied-Soul, Research, Science, and Neuroscience*](#). Some of the follow-up questions we need to ask, include:
 - ✓ What do we mean by sufficiency of Scripture?
 - ✓ How do we apply sufficiency of Scripture?
 - ✓ What is the relationship of common grace to the sufficiency of Scripture?
 - ✓ What does Scripture say about extra-biblical knowledge?
 - ✓ What does the Bible say about the role and place of science?
 - ✓ What are the implications of the Creation/Cultural Mandate on how biblical counselors engage with science and neuroscience?
 - ✓ What does the Bible say about embodied-souls and the role of biblical counselors in engaging with people comprehensively?
 - ✓ How do we use the lens of Scripture as our gaze for assessing extra-biblical truth?
 - ✓ How do we use the lens of Scripture as our gaze for assessing our own and other people’s models of biblical counseling?
 - ✓ What are my biblical presuppositions about the noetic effect of sin and its relationship to common grace findings?

It Just Got Much Deeper!

So...it's one thing to say, "I'm a 4th generation biblical counselor." That's fun. That's valid. That's one way of beginning to identify the *historical human influences* on our approach to biblical counseling.

However...it is not the only way. It is not the deepest way. When we think about line of thinking, now I'm saying something much richer than, "Bob Kellemen is part Romanian and part English-Irish." I'm saying something much deeper than, "Bob Kellemen is a 4th generation biblical counselor with streams of connection to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations of biblical counselors."

I'm saying something much more involved like,

"Bob Kellemen is a 4th generation biblical counselor with streams of connection to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations of biblical counselors who has these specific convictions about my theology and theory of people, problems, and solutions, and specific convictions about my methodology and practice of the personal ministry of the Word, and about my epistemology and source of truth for developing my theology and methodology of biblical counseling."

What About You?

How do you begin to answer these questions about who you are as a biblical counselor?

1. What are the areas of emphasis in my theology and theory of people, problems, and solutions?
2. What are the areas of emphasis in my methodology and practice of the personal ministry of the Word?
3. What are the areas of emphasis in my epistemology and source of truth for developing my theology and methodology of biblical counseling?

Part 7

18 Resources on the History of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Christian Soul Care, and Biblical Counseling

The Democracy of the Dead

G. K. Chesterton said it poetically.

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes—our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around.

Chesterton provides a healthy reminder for all of us, especially for those of us in the *modern* biblical counseling movement. Long before the 50-year-young nouthetic biblical counseling movement, the church had always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people to find healing, hope, and help in Christ.

The following resources point us to a number of seminal works that provide us with historical perspective and historical voices about the history of pastoral counseling, soul care, and the modern biblical counseling movement.

The History of Pastoral Care and Counseling

Clebsch, William, and Charles Jaekle. [*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*](#)

Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective introduces the reader to the historical matrix of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. Clebsch and Jaekle write convincingly that any model of pastoral counseling worthy of the title must include these four elements (sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding). After several chapters that overview the nature of these four tasks, the authors then provide historical samples illustrating the four tasks in historical perspective.

Deckard, Mark. [*Helpful Truth in Past Places: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling*](#)

Puritan writers-theologians were masters at understanding the nature of human beings and applying Scripture in practical ways to help people. Looking to Scripture as the final authority, the Puritans grounded their own counselling practices in a proper view of the sovereignty of God and the underlying heart issues of people. By understanding why people struggle and the provision God makes for our struggles, counsellors today will be better equipped to guide those they counsel toward God-appointed solutions.

Holifield, E. Brooks. [*A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*](#)

Others such as Clebsch and Jaekle and McNeil have written broad histories of soul care, but none have tackled the challenge of a focused study of soul care in American religious history. E. Brooks Holifield has penned the comprehensive guide that traces the trajectory of American pastoral care. Holifield's greatest gift in this book is his ability to synthesize large tracks of material. In particular, his subtitle communicates his understanding of the historical path taken by American pastors: "from salvation to self-realization."

Kellemen, Bob. [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](#)

Martin Luther not only reformed theology; his understanding of the gospel revolutionized soul care. In *Counseling Under the Cross*, biblical counselor Bob Kellemen mines Luther's writings to help readers gain a new appreciation for how Luther richly, relevantly, robustly, and relationally applied the gospel to suffering, sin, sanctification, and our search for peace with God. *Counseling Under the Cross* guides pastors, counselors, lay leaders, and friends toward a rich understanding of the gospel that will directly impact their personal ministry to others. Through lively vignettes, real-life stories, and direct quotes from Luther, readers are equipped to apply the gospel to themselves and others so together they find their hope and help in Christ alone.

Keller, Tim. [*"Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling."* *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 \(1988\): 11-44](#)

What Deckard's work, *Helpful Truth in Past Places: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling*, does in book format, Keller provides in article style. Don't let the fact that this is "just" an article fool you. Keller's work is robust and provides an outstanding "apologetic" for biblical pastoral counseling—then and now. He outlines how the Puritan pastors were soul physicians with a keen insight into the human condition and a compassionate and comprehensive understanding of how to care for God's sheep.

Kemp, Charles. [*Physicians of the Soul: A History of Pastoral Counseling*](#)

In *Physicians of the Soul*, Charles Kemp seeks to search out and describe the fact that the great preachers of church history were first of all great pastors—shepherds and counselors. Pastors of today would do well to follow their example and understand that they are called not only to the pulpit ministry of the Word, but also to the private, personal ministry of the Word.

Oden, Thomas. [*Classical Pastoral Care, Vol. 3: Pastoral Counsel*](#)

Classic Pastoral Care provides a topical arrangement of passages from classic Christian writings offering guidance on all major topics of pastoral theology. The four-volume set features writings from more than two hundred notable Christian authors—from Abelard and

Ambrose to Isaac Watts and Zwingli—arranged in thirty topical sections. Volume three, *Pastoral Counsel*, deals directly with the nature of the counseling relationship, the metaphors of soul care (from medicine, guidance, and education), the elements of the counseling relationship, the timing of good counsel, pastoral discernment, language and silence in counsel, truth-telling and deception, admonition and discipline.

Purves, Andrew. [*Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*](#)

Too often pastoral care is uninformed by historical practice and is overly influenced by psychological theory and practice, according to Andrew Purves. At least one consequence of this is that it is often disaffiliated from the church's theological heritage. Purves examines Christian writers from the past who represent the classical tradition in pastoral theology—classical in the sense that they and their texts have shaped the minds and practices of pastors in enduring ways. He reflects on texts from Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Martin Bucer, and Richard Baxter. He includes a brief biography of each author, introduces the major themes in the writer's theology, and discusses the issues arising for pastoral work.

The History of Christian Soul Care

Ford, Coleman, and Shawn Wilhite. [*Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers*](#)

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls helps pastors to embrace a classic, biblical vision of ministry through the study of selected pastoral virtues and early church figures. Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great both referred to ministry as “the care of souls.” Calling for a “return to the sources,” professors Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite ponder what a scriptural vision of ministry is, how patristic voices help inform this vision, and how pastors today can cultivate this pastoral vision in their churches. Each chapter examines an important pastoral topic—such as humility, the sacraments, and contemplative theology—and brings it to life through a constructive model and profiles of early church fathers. Encouraged by the patristic wisdom of Irenaeus, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and more, readers learn a simple and slower model for pastoring that they can emulate as they care for their communities. A slower pace of life may, in fact, help pastors cultivate the soil of souls more richly and, as a result, return to ministry as “the care of souls.”

Kellemen, Bob, and Karole Edwards. [*Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*](#)

The African American church has always helped hurting people through the ministries of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. This four-dimensional model is the traditional and widely recognized pattern for understanding one-another ministry, spiritual friendship, and pastoral care. *Beyond the Suffering* offers an in-depth exploration of this rich tradition showing Christians proven ways to help people find hope in the midst of their deep pain.

Kellemen, Bob, and Susan Ellis. [*Sacred Friendships: Celebrating the Legacy of Women Heroes of the Faith*](#)

Sacred Friendships celebrates the incredible stories of over fifty amazing Christian women. It gives voice to the voiceless as it narrates how godly women for the past 2,000 years have provided sustaining and healing soul care along with reconciling and guiding spiritual direction. *Sacred Friendships* enlightens readers to the often neglected legacy of Christian women and then equips women and men to apply that legacy to their lives and ministries.

McNeil, John. [*A History of the Cure of Souls*](#)

McNeil provides readers with a magisterial mapping of the landscape of two millennium of soul care and spiritual direction. In a brief but pointed section on Old Testament and New Testament spiritual care, McNeil documents that God's people have always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people through shared conversations around the Word. He then transports readers through church history both chronologically and denominationally. For an introduction to the history of soul care, no one does it better.

The History of the Modern Biblical Counseling Movement

Fraser, Cameron. [*Developments in Biblical Counseling*](#)

Are you looking for a brief introduction to what the biblical counseling movement is and how it has changed over the years? In *Developments in Biblical Counseling*, J. Cameron Fraser turns a journalistic eye to this question and presents a concise assessment. Introducing us to the formative work of Jay Adams, Fraser outlines several themes of biblical counseling that became foundational for the movement as a whole and observes how the movement received criticisms from outside and made necessary developments from within. He points out that some of these developments have an affinity with Puritan approaches to counseling that Adams rejects but may point in a more consistently biblical direction.

Kellemen, Bob. [*Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement: O. Hobart Mowrer*](#)

In this introductory article, Bob Kellemen explores the influence that O. Hobart Mowrer had on Jay Adams' and his launch of the modern nouthetic counseling movement. Kellemen allows the primary source writings of Adams and Mowrer to speak for themselves regarding the connection(s) between Mowrer and Adams.

Kellemen, Bob. [*A Concise History of Jay Adams's Launch of the Modern Nouthetic Counseling Movement*](#)

In this 13-page free PDF, you will learn about: 1.) The Words Nouthetic, Nouthesia, and Nouthetic. 2.) The Story of Jay Adams and the Launch of the Modern Nouthetic Counseling Movement. 3.) 3 Reasons Why Jay Adams Called His Counseling Model "Nouthetic." 4.) What

Jay Adams Meant by “Nouthetic Counseling” and “Nouthetic Confrontation.” 5.) Bonus Content: Jay Adams, Nouthetic Counseling, and Neuroscience.

Lambert, Heath. [*The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*](#)

Those inside and outside of the biblical counseling movement recognize differences between the foundational work of Jay Adams and that of second generation thought leaders. Heath Lambert shows how refinements in framework, methodology, and engagement style changed the face of the biblical counseling movement. Find out how the biblical counseling movement developed and how the second generation of leadership differed from the leadership of the past.

Lelek, Jeremy. [*Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future*](#)

In *Biblical Counseling Basics*, Dr. Jeremy Lelek offers a comprehensive approach to biblical counseling, beginning by retracing the movement's history, then exploring its basic tenets, and finally providing helpful insight for the future of biblical counseling.

Powlison, David. [*The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*](#)

Beginning in the late 1960s, a biblical counseling movement sought to reclaim counseling for the church and provide a Christian alternative to mainstream psychiatry and psychotherapy. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* is an informative and thought-provoking account of that movement. This historical account combines careful scholarship with a unique, eyewitness insight. This book is an invaluable resource for those who want to understand the biblical counseling movement.

Part 8

3 Books on Biblical Counseling in Church History: A Treasure Hunt!

My History with Church History

When I was in seminary in the 1980s, open warfare broke out over competing counseling models. During these debates, I was struck by the fact that no one was using church history as a guide to assess modern church counseling approaches. I kept thinking:

“Surely the church has always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people!”

So I started reading everything I could find (this was before Google and Amazon) on the history of soul care. For the past 40 years—that’s a whole generation—I’ve continued that study of church history.

Sure enough, I have been able to learn a great deal about what makes biblical counseling truly biblical and what makes Christian counseling truly Christian by learning from that great cloud of historical witnesses—Christians who have been counseling one another for the past 2,000 years.

Biblical Counseling Before the Modern Biblical Counseling Movement

The “modern biblical counseling movement” was launched in the 1970s by Jay Adams. Jay wrote in an era where many in the church were seen as abdicating their responsibility to counsel God’s people. Or, if pastors were counseling God’s people, they often focused on secular psychology rather than on biblical principles. Jay launched the “nouthetic counseling movement” to return the church to their ancient role of soul care.

Of course, this indicates that there had been—for nearly 2,000 years—a long history of biblical counseling that predates the modern biblical counseling movement. That’s what I’ve been exploring for the past 40 years—that’s my 4-decade-long treasure hunt!

The Fruit of My Treasure Hunt

It’s been a joyful treasure hunt to learn from brothers and sisters in the faith who have gone before us. My historical treasure hunt has led to:

- A course on *The History of Soul Care* that I’ve taught over two dozen times in seminary settings.
- My Ph.D. dissertation, [*Spiritual Care in Historical Perspective: Martin Luther as a Case Study in Christian Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding*](#). This is an in-depth historical examination of how Martin Luther practiced the four classic aspects of

Christian soul care and spiritual direction: sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. **Note:** At the link above, you can download the complete PDF of my dissertation for free.

- The book [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](#). As the title suggests, this book explores Martin Luther's pastoral care and counseling.
- The book [*Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*](#). As this title indicates, this book explores how African American Christians—many of them enslaved—provided one-another soul care and biblical counseling to each other. **Note:** At the link above, you can download the complete PDF of the book for free.
- The book [*Sacred Friendships: Celebrating the Legacy of Women Heroes of the Faith*](#). As this third title reveals, historic biblical counseling has long been an arena where women soul care givers provided rich, relational biblical ministry. In fact, many of the “church fathers” were discipled and counseled by women (as you’ll learn in this book). **Note:** At the link above, you can download the complete PDF of the book for free.

Learning from the Ancient Paths

Indeed, the church has always been about the ministry of what we now call “biblical counseling.” And our modern, 50-year-young nouthetic biblical counseling movement has much to learn from these ancient paths of church history.

Conclusion

Church History-Informed Embodied-Soul Care

Over forty years ago, during a time of “counseling wars” in modern American Evangelical culture, the reality hit me:

“Surely the Church has always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people to find hope and healing in Christ.”

After over four decades of primary source reading and research in church history—specifically the history of Christian soul care—I am more convinced than ever that we need to “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16). Our modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement is a fifty-year young approach to people-helping. We have much to learn from that great cloud of historical witnesses who have gone before us.

A movement seeking to build upon the sufficiency of Scripture seems sometimes to insist upon the sufficiency of the modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement. Divergences from the tenants of modern nouthetic biblical counseling are treated as if they are divergences from God’s Word.

Being church history-informed is catalytic. Studying how the Church has comprehensively and compassionately ministered to one another for 2,000 years provides corrective lenses to examine our modern eyesight and expose our modern misperceptions.

As we conclude, it seems fitting to paraphrase G. K. Chesterton, applying his classic quote to our modern nouthetic biblical counseling movement.

The history of Christian soul care is democracy extended through time. Church history-informed soul care gives votes to the most obscure of all classes—our spiritual ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead—not living dead zombies, but spiritually resurrected believers from church history.

Historical soul care refuses to submit to the minority view of modernity who merely happen to be walking around today. Instead, church history-informed biblical counseling uses the old eyes, but clear vision, of ancient Christian soul care givers to broaden, deepen, and enrich our fifty-year-young nouthetic biblical counseling movement.