

UNPACKING DIAGNOSES: AN IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

When using the “unpacking diagnoses” resources, it is important to understand, consider, and agree to the following disclaimer.

Cultural Lingo not Validation

The cultural influence of psychiatric labels and diagnoses permeates the vernacular of many people who seek counseling. It is not unusual to provide ministry to a counselee who is an apparent expert on the diagnosis he or she has been given by a doctor (i.e. borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, etc.). Unfortunately, within the Christian culture, individuals are often much more familiar with concepts such as “bipolar disorder”, “attention deficit hyperactive disorder”, “schizophrenia”, or “self esteem” than concepts such as sanctification, depravity, sovereignty, or grace. As such, it is very important for the biblical counselor to become equipped with understanding as it pertains to the often intimidating labels of psychiatry and psychology. It is imperative, at this point, not to confuse understanding with endorsement. The following resources use the same “lingo” offered by secular psychotherapy, however, ABC does not validate the labels or the worldview upon which the labels are built. Instead, the intended purpose of this series is to familiarize pastors and counselors with various themes with which they may be confronted during their counseling ministries, while also offering truth as it relates to the actual “heart issues” that fuel the symptoms often cited in the varying diagnoses. ABC adheres to the same

perspective of diagnosis as those individuals cited within the reference page at the end of this disclaimer.

Resource Design

The resources offered in this series are not intended to be exhaustive in scope. While many possible issues and suggestions are offered, the complexity of many human experiences limits the capacity of most resources to completely dissect every component of every issue with which individuals are faced. However, the concepts offered are based on both literature and knowledge drawn from extensive counseling experience. Most importantly, however, the truths offered are based upon the eternal and infallible Word of the living God, and are therefore sufficient to penetrate every aspect of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Resource Utilization

The resources offered in the “unpacking series” are designed for simple utilization and implementation. For the licensed professional with an educational background in psychology, counseling, or social work, the biblical themes offered in this series provide the tools to properly address the real issues with which counselees are struggling. Ultimately, “bipolar disorder” is not the problem, it is simply a label that is used to describe the actual issues that

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shape the obscure label “bipolar disorder”. Fear of man, hopelessness, fits of rage, and sexual immorality are some of the biblical themes that address the real problems often disguised behind the label. These resources attempt to “connect the dots” for those who may lack understanding in how to apply the Bible to issues that are thought to be novel as cited in the DSM-IV-TR. Ultimately, counseling someone to address issues of anger, sexual immorality, and fear is much more transforming than counseling someone to address his or her “bipolar disorder”. Additionally, simply because someone struggles with the issues of anger, depression, fear, or other criteria listed for “bipolar disorder” does not merit the necessary diagnosis of such a label. This is ultimately a clash of two worldviews.

On the other side of the coin, for the pastor or layperson, this series offers powerful suggestions for addressing counselees who may cite a particular disorder. As stated earlier, many of the labels used by counselees can be intimidating to pastors and others working in ministry. Feeling ill-equipped, it is not uncommon for pastors to outsource parishioners due to feelings of inadequacy in the face of such big labels as offered by the world of psychiatry. This resource will provide an overview of many such labels, and will offer balanced, informed recommendations to deal with each. Therefore a knowledge base is offered to equip men and women in the ministry to comprehend the same language as spoken by many entering into the counseling process.

Important Precautions

While the resources in this series serve as a powerful tool in the realm of biblical counseling, it is important to reiterate the fact that everyone has “blind spots” with which they are unfamiliar. DO NOT use these resources as a simple “cookie cutter” recipe for the cited diagnoses. People and situations are very complex. Listen and seek to understand each counselee on a very personal basis, and realize that individuals may struggle with varying issues that are not listed on the same resource of this series. In other words, symptoms may be present that the DSM-IV-TR might attribute to both “bipolar disorder” and “borderline personality disorder”. Focus on heart issues, not labels. Also, DO NOT attempt to be the expert in unfamiliar territory. Seek leadership and counsel from others with more experience when a “blind spot” is encountered. AVOID legalistic counsel that includes two passages and a prayer (only). DO NOT tell someone to stop taking medication. ALWAYS send counselees to his or her doctor with appropriate questions (see Fitzpatrick & Hendrickson, 2006). Cessation of certain medications can create harm for individuals if not conducted by a physician. While using the resources, stay focused on particular issues, and do not bounce from place to place regarding themes found in the handouts. Be practical. “Cure” is not the aim of biblical counsel, instead it is conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (sanctification). Teach counselees the significance of eternal focus versus temporal focus (but DO NOT ignore the temporal in the process).

Prior to using the “unpacking” resources offered by ABC, it is required, upon your word, to read at least two of the following seminal articles before these handouts are actually utilized with counselees. Upon checking “agree”, it is assumed that at least two of the following articles have been read.

Recommended Resources:

- Babler, J. (1999). A biblical critique of the DSM-IV. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 18(1), 25-29.
- Powlison, D. (2005). The sufficiency of scripture to diagnose and cure souls. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 23(2), 2-14
- Powlison, D. (1996). How do you help a psychologized counselee? *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 15(1), 2-7.
- Powlison, D. (1999). X-ray questions: Drawing out the whys and wherefores of human behavior. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 18(1), 2-9.
- Powlison, D. (1995). Idols of the heart and “vanity fair”. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 13(2), 35-50.
- Welch, E. (2003). Motives: Why do I do the things I do? *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 22(1), 48-56.