

Sharing Scripture in Counseling with Wisdom

“Biblical counseling endeavors to build a relationship with another person in which God’s work of change can thrive. It is therefore dependent on the Word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus Christ. It seeks to build a contextualized understanding of the counselee (past and present) and will view that data through the lens of Scripture. The Biblical counselor rests in the knowledge that he is not the change agent, but a tool in the hands of the One who is...In his work with the counselee the biblical counselor always recognizes the sovereignty of God, the transformative grace of Christ, and the insight-giving and conviction-producing ministry of the Holy Spirit. In all of this the biblical counselor sees himself not as an isolated instrument of change, but one whose work is intimately connected to God’s primary tool of change: the church, with all of its God-ordained duties, structures, and means of grace.”¹

Our Counsel should be Anchored in Scripture.

We believe that God’s Word is authoritative, sufficient, and relevant (Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12-13). The inspired and inerrant Scriptures, rightly interpreted and carefully applied, offer us God’s comprehensive wisdom. We learn to understand who God is, who we are, the problems we face, how people change, and God’s provision for that change in the Gospel (John 8:31-32; 10:10; 17:17). No other source of knowledge thoroughly equips us to counsel in ways that transform the human heart (Psalm 19:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3). Other systems of counseling aim for other goals and assume a different dynamic of change. The wisdom given by God in His Word is distinctive and robust. He comprehensively addresses the sin and suffering of all people in all situations.

Wise counseling is an insightful application of God’s all-embracing truth to our complex lives (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Philippians 1:9-11). It does not merely collect proof-texts from the Bible. Wise counseling requires ongoing practical theological labor in order to understand Scripture, people, and situations (2 Timothy 2:15). We must continually develop our personal character, case-wise understanding of people, and pastoral skills (Romans 15:14; Colossians 1:28-29) ...Scripture alone teaches a perspective and way of looking at life by which we can think biblically about and critically evaluate information and actions from any source (Colossians 2:2-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).²

I. Cautions in Sharing Scripture in Counseling:



¹ Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2018), 44.

² <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>

II. Ways we Share Scripture in Counseling:

“The goal of biblical counseling is spiritual, relational, and personal maturity as evidenced in desires, thoughts, motives, actions, and emotions that increasingly reflect Jesus (Ephesians 4:17-5:2) ...such personal change must be centered on the person of Christ *and* are convinced that personal ministry centered on Christ and anchored in Scripture offers the only lasting hope and loving help to a fallen and broken world”.³

Pray Scripture - The Bible is packed with truth that is relevant in all of our lives, so take the word of God and pray specific scripture. Help your counselee learn to pray well.

- Pray God’s commands; *guard me from temptation* (Matt. 26:41), *free me from pride, idolatry, and addictions* (1 Cor. 10:13), *help me to walk in a manner worthy of You* (Col. 1:9-13), *help me put my hope in You alone* (2 Cor. 4:16-18), *give me faith that perseveres* (1 Sam. 12:23-24), *strengthen me to endure the battle* (Eph. 6:10-20).
- Pray God’s promises; *Your steadfast love endures forever* (Ps. 100:5), *Your word is true and equips me for every good work* (2 Tim. 3:16), *in You I have joy and peace that surpasses all understanding* (Phil. 4.7), *I trust in You to lead and protect me* (Prov. 3:5-8).
- Pray for Holiness; *walk by the Spirit and not gratify the flesh* (Gal. 5:16, 22-24), *humility* (Ps 25:9, Matt 23:12, Phil 2:3-4), *motivated by love* (1 Jn. 4:7-21), *imitator of Christ* (1 Cor. 11:1), *compassionate, kind, patient, wise, grateful, forgiving* (Col 3:12-17), *glorify God in all they do* (1 Cor. 10:31), *devoted to godliness* (1 Tim. 4:8). We pray for healing, but most of all pray for holiness.
- *Lord, I pray that _____ love will abound more and more for you. That they will grow with knowledge and discernment so they may approve what is excellent, be pure and blameless, and be filled with the fruit of the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. For your glory and praise Alone. Amen.*

“The Spirit of God will use the Word of God to help the people of God pray increasingly according to the will of God”. Donald Whitney

Help them interpret the difficulties of life through a biblical lens with the focus on God: His character, promises, and purposes; Christ: His life, ministry, and character; Holy Spirit: His role, guidance, and help; Scripture: praying, thinking, and living biblically. We want the truth of Scripture to reveal practical application, helping to strengthen their commitment and reliance on the Word (John 17:17; Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; Ps. 19, 86, 119; Phil. 2:12-16).⁴

³ <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>

⁴ <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/04/19/assigning-beneficial-homework>

III. Examples of Sharing Scripture in Counseling:

A single Scripture. This is the one you need to be careful about because you don't want to take it out of context. But a few examples of this would be.

- 1 John 1:9 – to lead someone in confession.
- Psalm 46:10 – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”.
- Jeremiah 2:13 – struggling with idolatry, going to the Lord who is the fountain of living water.
- Col. 3:2 – set their minds on things above or 4:2 – to continue steadfastly in prayer.

A passage of Scripture.

1. Philippians 4:6-9 – In the situation, our thinking can take us on a downward spiral, but Paul gives us a three-fold plan for overcoming worry by praying, thinking and living biblically.

Praying biblically v6-7. We can take our concerns, fears, doubts, emotions to the Lord in prayer. God gives us the gift of peace, an “inner calm and tranquility,” in response to our thankful and trusting prayers. Pray confidently, knowing that in the midst of these circumstances you can trust that God is in control with a plan and purpose.

Thinking biblically v8. When we are spiritually blind, our thoughts are futile and cause us to focus on our hurt, pain, inadequacies, or failures. But by God's grace we can have the ability to think rightly, so after Paul directs us to pray with a thankful heart, he gives us a guide for what to think about. “*Whatever is true,*” (meditate on God's Word); “*whatever is honorable,*” (be in awe of the Lord's power and provision); “*whatever is just,*” (reflect on what is righteous and holy); “*whatever is pure,*” (dwell on what is morally clean or undefiled); “*whatever is lovely,*” (focus on what is kind or gracious); and “*whatever is commendable,*” (consider virtues of courage or respect). The Holy Spirit is working in us, renewing our mind (Rom. 12:2) so that our mind has the ability to think about what is “*excellent*” and “*worthy of praise.*”

Living biblically v9. Praying and thinking biblically must precede living biblically because our thoughts affect our behavior. Self-focused thoughts can hinder us spiritually by shifting our focus from the omnipotent God to our own desires (Mark 4:19), which is why Jesus refutes anxiety with truth, promises, and reason in Matthew 6:25-34. We cannot allow anxiousness to hold us back from fully living and serving our Almighty God. Paul had first-hand experience in living righteously in the midst of trials and tribulations. When he wrote to practice the things you “*have learned and received and heard and seen in me,*” he knew that for his readers (both then and now) the result would be the peace of God despite hard circumstances.

2. Isaiah 40:28-31; 41:10 – discuss the Attributes of God and encourage them to focus and rest in who God is.

- **V28 – God is Eternal.** Things around us are wasting away, unstable, uncertain, untrustworthy, unsafe, unpredictable...we can rest in knowing that God is none of these things. He is eternal, he is unchanging, he is stable, he is limitless, he is without bounds. *In our situation we can trust in God's promises, that are forever. God's love is everlasting, His goodness, comfort, faithfulness, peace, joy, and graciousness are all everlasting. It doesn't change based off how we feel.*
- **V28 – God is Creator** - His sovereignty is not removed from His creation, he created us to be in relationship with him. *I know in your situation it might seem like God isn't with you, but God is near and active, supplying all you need when you need it to endure this struggle.*
- **V28 – God is all-powerful.** God has created us with limitations, we will grow weary and faint. God doesn't, he has unlimited power. *You might feel weak, that you can't do it but God is the giver of power, He is the one who increases and renews our strength. Let's go to Him together.*
- **V28 – God is Incomprehensible** which means we can never fully understand God. God's greatness is beyond searching out or discovering; it is too great to ever be fully known. **God is all-knowing.** God knows us, everything about us (Ps. 139:1-6), and his knowledge is without limitation (Jer. 32:17). *In our struggle we typically try to figure things out so we can fix them, but we don't have to because we can go to the one who knows it all and that has a plan & purpose for our life.*

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3. Proverbs 3:5-8 -using a passage with a chart (Concerns/Responsibilities) in session to encourage them to trust God alone in their situation. What areas of their life are their responsibilities to steward well and what areas are they trying to control that should be taken to God in prayer? Help them put their trust in the Lord and not lean on their own understanding. *Other examples: Ephesians 4 and using the Emotion log or 'Y' chart.

A full chapter. You can read them a passage of Scripture and walk through some important points. Get their feedback throughout the conversation, listen.

- Refer to handout example of Psalm 27
- Ephesians Chapter 2 – identity and unity in Christ
- Psalm 25 – waiting, trusting in the Lord and/or for depression & anxiety.
- Psalm 13 – share how to lament.

A whole book/letter. You won't review this at once, but you can use a letter of the Bible to encourage someone in a specific area for growing in godliness.

- 1 John – Abiding in Christ, to see the fullness of God's Love.
- 1 Peter – Share hope in suffering.

A bible narrative. You can meet for a few weeks and work through the narrative together. Or for a shorter narrative, like Jonah, you can ask them to read before. This would depend on the situation shared.

- Refer to handout example of Jonah.

Counseling through Psalms 27

When our fear is misplaced, it can paralyze us and cause unnecessary worry or anxiety. It's important to understand the object of our fear so we can redirect our self-centered fear to a God-centered fear. We can learn from David in Psalm 27, when his adversaries were out to kill him, he prayed and found refuge in the Lord who was ultimately in control. Despite his enemies, David rejoiced in the waiting and in the uncertainties by having confidence in God alone. The points below are not an exhaustive list of the truths in Psalm 27 but are a few reminders to encourage you on how to have a reverent God-centered fear.

Read Psalms 27 together and review the points below:

David prayed in adoration.

- *The Lord is my light* (v1)– the light overcomes darkness.
- *The Lord is my salvation* (v1)– guarantees the defeat of all enemies and provides eternal hope.
- *The Lord is my stronghold* (v1)– assures safety, refuge and protection against all assaults.

David rested in virtues that came from the Lord.

- *I will be confident* (v3) – assurance that God is in control and has the power to save.
- *I will sing and make melody to the Lord* (v6) – he worshipped and had joy despite the circumstances.
- *Be strong, take courage* (v13) – courage came when David trusted in God's strength.
- *Wait for the Lord* (v13) – being patient in God's timing is essential to eliminate anxiety and bring peace.

David sought God for wisdom and direction.

- *Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud* (v7) – David prays for continued victory knowing that his safety and salvation is from God alone.
- *Teach me your way* (v11) – He relied on the word and will of God, praying for wisdom and direction.
- *Lead me on a level path* (v11) – David had to have trust and faith in God, knowing He is the only one who could provide ultimate protection against his enemies.

David kept his eyes on the Lord.

- *Gaze upon the beauty of the Lord* (v4) – David gazed on God's goodness and graciousness, being in awe of who God is, which allowed his fear to be in reverence of His great power.
- *Your face, Lord, do I seek* (v8) – David prayed and desired the Lord in the time of trouble. He sought his beauty, guidance and refuge.

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- *The Lord will take me in (v10)* – despite the abandonment from his parents, he had faith the Lord would not forsake him.

Things you can ask them in your time together:

1. What are you currently fearful of in your life? Do you have a misplaced fear? Pray together for the Lord to reveal areas to surrender and submit.
2. Do you feel attacked, unloved or hurt? Do you have enemies that seem to be at war against you? Is there anyone you might be at odds with?
3. Write out all the things Psalms 27 says about God. Meditate on this truth and write out how this practically brings you comfort, peace, strength and confidence?
4. What virtues could you begin praying for? Patience, courage, joy, strength? How might each of these help you grow in your spiritual maturity? *Whatever they mention - Pray with and for them.*

Counseling through Bible Narrative -Jonah

The Lord commanded the prophet Jonah to preach against the wickedness of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom. Assyria was a ruthless and idolatrous nation. However, Jonah was stubborn and instead chose to flee to Tarshish, stating, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2). Jonah wanted justice his way for Nineveh to receive God’s judgment by being destroyed. In the book of Jonah, we learn how to respond to the will of God and how to share the love and mercy of God with others.

Suggest to your friend to read the whole book of Jonah prior to your time together and write out the things they learned about Jonah and about God OR you can read through it together.

Note: There is a lot to cover within these four chapters, so the questions below are just to get your conversation started as the Lord reveals more to you both.

Start by discussing the takeaways they had about Jonah and about God. Take time to listen and discern their understanding. Ask questions such as the following:

- How would you summarize what happened in the book of Jonah?
- How would you describe Jonah?
- Did Jonah have reasons to be angry toward the Assyrians?
- What do you observe about Jonah’s actions? How did God respond?
- In what ways do you relate to Jonah?
- What did you learn about God in this narrative?

Communicate your gratefulness in their sharing and then begin discussing the few points below to bring encouragement in their area of struggle.

What do we learn about Jonah?

Jonah was angry. Why? He didn’t want to see God’s mercy extended to his enemies. In his bitterness and pride he felt they were undeserving of His love, wanted justice his way and felt Nineveh should be destroyed. *Have you ever felt this about somebody?*

Jonah was disobedient. How? He was unfaithful to God’s command and ran away in his pride and stubbornness. He felt spiritually superior and, in his grumbling, would have preferred to die than show them mercy. *Have you ever been disobedient to the Lord’s command?*

Jonah was repentant. Where? In the belly of the whale. Despite his efforts to run away, the Lord was persistent and forgiving. Jonah expected to die but realized the Lord spared him. He prayed for God’s help (2:1-2), he accepted God’s discipline (2:3), he trusted God’s promises (2:4-7), and yielded to God’s will (2:8-9). Jonah couldn’t save himself, but the goodness of God brings him to repentance. So, we see Jonah go from rebellion to repentance. *When have you gone from rebellion to repentance? Is there anything you need to repent of now?*

What do we learn about God?

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- God is sovereign. God will accomplish what He wants through us, despite our objections or procrastination. How much easier it would be if we, unlike Jonah, would submit to Him without delay!
- God is omnipresent. We cannot hide from God, He is always with us. Despite Jonah's attempt to run away, God was with him in his obedience and disobedience.
- God is gracious. He disciplines Jonah through his disobedience. He hears him (4:1-4), comforts him (4:5-8), teaches him (4:9-11), and restores his ministry. Jonah, a man who lacked compassion for people who would perish and live eternally apart from God, was still used to bring a whole city to faith in the Lord.
- God is merciful. Nineveh, an enemy of Israel, had moved away from God and into idolatry. The people were wicked yet the Lord magnified his sovereignty and showed them love and mercy. No matter how awful our sin, we can be spared judgment like the Ninevites if we seek God's mercy and choose the path of humility and repentance.

Follow up things you can suggest so they can continually be encouraged by God's Word:

Read Jonah again this week and reflect on the things we discussed in our time together. Journal through the questions below as the Lord continues to reveal areas for growth. Let's meet again and I'd love to hear what the Lord is revealing specific to you and your situation.

1. How are you encouraged knowing that God has a plan for you according to His purpose and will accomplish it? Read Ephesians 2:4-10 and Romans 8:28.
2. Read Proverbs 18:10. Do you tend to run away from the Lord? Run *to* the Lord, not away *from* Him.
3. Do you struggle with pride? Are you ever impatient with others who are spiritually ignorant or immature? Wanting justice in your own way, in your own timing?
4. How can you practically begin trusting the Lord and run to Him when you have been wronged, become angry, and desire worldly justice?
5. Is there someone in your life that God might be using to get your attention, like the men on the boat?
6. Read 2 Peter 3:9. Do you need to seek God's mercy and repent? Is there someone else in your life that you can show God's mercy and help them with their struggle in sin/disobedience?