

CHRIST- CENTERED BIBLICAL COUNSELING

BOB KELLEMAN & STEVE VIARS
GENERAL EDITORS



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Foreword

David Powlison

What kind of book are you picking up? *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* is like an architect's 1:12 scale model. A scale model intends to communicate "the concept" of a structure, not the myriad details of engineering, construction process, financing, and the like. Think of this book as a scale model of biblical counseling, delineating key theological underpinnings and sketching key methodological implications. There's enough detail to give you a feel for what the finished house will look like. But making the house your home will take work and prayer, further study and conversation, much putting into practice, and a lifetime of our maturing together.

Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling paints the broad strokes of counseling. Just for starters, those broad strokes revolutionize the meanings that our culture attaches to the word *counseling*. These chapters do not intend to cover all counseling problems or topics—or to probe particular problems or topics in great detail. However, the discussion and case studies will give you a solid feel for how the Word of life speaks into the lives of troubled and troublesome people who face a world of troubles.

This book affirms that a *good* counselor is many things simultaneously: tender and firm, responsive yet purposeful, candid and tactful, patient yet urgent, attentive and instructive, profound yet practical, prayerful and hard-working, comforting yet challenging, empathetic and objective, flexible yet committed, faithful to Jesus Christ and relevant to any person facing any trouble...along with many other good and desirable qualities. While the ingredients of deft conversation are hard to capture on paper, the tone and content of what you read will give you a feel for how godly wisdom carries on a compassionate and constructive conversation.

This book will not unpack the differing ways that, say, Deuteronomy or Ruth, a psalm or proverb, a scene in Luke, or a sentence from Ephesians

come to life in the grit and grime of life lived. But you will gain a feel for the comprehensive relevance and adaptability of God's diverse self-revelation. The Word made flesh turns worlds upside down. The Christ who calls all nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples also speaks to each individual at the very points of deepest need.

As part of your reading strategy, approach this book as a scale model intending to communicate the concept of biblical counseling. All of us who counsel or desire to do so will better serve the welfare and well-being of others as we catch this vision, so that we can then work out the myriad details and implications.

It is no accident that this is the work of *many* contributors—a network, a coalition, a community of shared vision and mission. We are united in the conviction that the Christian faith speaks foundationally to the issues of counseling.

We are not clones, of course. We live and work within different ecclesiastical cultures and denominations. We serve in different organizations, pursuing different ministry objectives. We have different gifts, different strengths and weaknesses. But an underlying unity predominates. You will notice how consistently the common ground of Christian faith controls the discourse. Take careful notice of the common commitments that bring diverse Christians to work together.

As you read, you will note these pages represent a *development* upon the hard work of a previous generation. You will hear in the core commitments an essential continuity with the past. For example,

- Reality is God-centered and all human beings are worshippers, whether or not they are conscious of this reality and its implications.
- God our Father, Christ our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our Life-giver is purposefully on-scene and actively working in people's lives.
- Scripture is comprehensively relevant to the things that concern, preoccupy, and trouble humankind.
- Counseling is an integral aspect of ministry and of church life.

Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling upholds these commitments and more. So come to listen. Learn. Ponder. Expect familiar Bible words, truths, metaphors, and passages to come at life and counseling from a fresh angle, and to generate fresh implications.

Then ask questions that carry your learning forward: How might I understand and handle this life problem or this theological reality with greater faithfulness and wisdom? How can I better conceptualize and practice this aspect of counseling? How can I grow truer to the mind-set and express purposes of Christ?

Ultimately the purpose of a scale model is to build the real thing. So read as if you are also part of the construction crew. As one who desires to counsel biblically, help to build a proper structure for faithful counseling ministry within the living body of Christ. Give yourself to the work of reading well, so that your response to this book contributes to this work-in-progress that God calls “my people.” We grow up into the image of Jesus Christ by speaking truth in love, and that is the heart of a counseling model and methodology worth building.

David Powlison received his AB from Harvard College and worked four years in psychiatric hospitals before attending seminary. He graduated with an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary and began a career in biblical counseling. Along the way he received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in the history of science and medicine, with a focus in the history of psychiatry. David has been at the forefront of thinking and writing in biblical counseling for more than 30 years. He has written numerous articles on counseling and on the relationship between faith and psychology. His books include *Speaking Truth in Love*, *Seeing with New Eyes*, and *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*. David is the senior editor for the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*. He teaches as a faculty member for the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and also serves as a visiting professor at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Part 1

A Practical Theology of Biblical Counseling

The Glory of God: The Goal of Biblical Counseling

John Piper and Jack Delk

John Piper

While preaching a sermon series at our church on the subject of eschatology, I taught from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 about Jesus' second coming. Paul begins and ends the passage in a way that allowed me to say to my people, "*This* is what you do with eschatology." Paul begins like this: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." Then he closes, "Therefore encourage one another with these words." He begins and ends on a *pastoral* note. Eschatology is about how you suffer and how you help.

I stopped speaking, and we took some time for discussion. People only wanted to know whether the time frame was premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial. I responded, "You're missing the point. Do you hear this? Paul doesn't want them to be ignorant of the fact that Jesus is alive. Jesus will come back. We will be with Him forever. Why? So they'll *grieve* a certain way. So they'll *encourage* (comfort) each other a certain way. Do you see what knowledge is about? It's about how to grieve. It's about how to counsel grieving friends. You speak knowledge into people's lives, and it impacts their grief. This is what your mouth is for: 'The mouth of the wise is a fountain of life.' Knowledge is so others can drink life-giving words. Doctrine is all about delight, all about how you live, all about how you counsel."

Defining Biblical Counseling

As a starting foundation, consider my definition of biblical counseling: Biblical counseling is God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people. I'd like to unpack that definition in what follows, and ask, What is the relationship between delight and doctrine? What is the relationship between counseling and the church? What is the relationship between God's glory and His love for us?

Teaching Truth

Biblical counseling is God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally-in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people. What does that mean? First, it means *teaching truth*. That 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 passage bursts with truth:

Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Biblical counseling is nothing if it is not God-centered and Bible-saturated. R.C. Sproul said to me not long after James Boice died that in one of his last conversations with him, Dr. Boice said, "R.C., we are surrounded by pastoral wimps who say, 'People don't need teaching, they don't need knowledge: they need to be hugged, they need silence, they need stories, they need experiences shared.'" James Boice is absolutely right about the shrinking emphasis on teaching. People desperately need to be taught about the nature of God. They desperately need a biblical, God-centered perspective

on everything. *Before* a calamity like September 11, we lay the foundations for our people of the granite sovereignty and glory of God so that they don't say, "Nonsense!" or don't shut their mouths with nothing to say. That's what biblical counseling is about—whether it is from the pulpit, in the office, or over the fence in the backyard. My take on the nature of counseling is that it has to do with knowledge, it has to do with our mouth, it has to do with doctrine, it has to do with the nature of God—communicated in ways that change hearers.

I get that from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and, of course, it is all over the Bible. Consider Romans 15:4: "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures *we might have hope*" (emphasis added). Everything written is hope-giving. It all moves from written knowledge to heart-fearing. Or Psalm 19:7-8, "The law of the LORD is perfect, *reviving* the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, *making wise* the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, *rejoicing* the heart." Teaching makes alive. Witness makes wise. Precepts produce joy. If they don't, something is wrong. You are doing something wrong!

Precepts produce change in emotions. Preaching goes to the emotions with doctrine. John 15:11 says, "These things I have spoken to you...*that your joy might be full.*" Speaking is about joy. Preaching is about joy. Counseling is about joy. You go from the head to the mouth to the head to the heart and produce joy, which transforms a person's life.

Restoring Counseling to the Church

Let me shift to my second concern—getting counseling into the church. Where else would it be, for goodness' sake? Can it be anywhere else and be true?

There are hindrances here. Let me point out and address just one. A lot of people reading this might respond, "It doesn't work," or "I've never seen anybody given to doctrine who is emotionally in touch!" There's one of the biggest obstacles. Here's my recommendation. Almost everything I do with my life is intended to solve this problem. If counseling, as I have laid it out, is to be restored to the church, *affection must be restored to reflection*. If counseling is to be restored to the church, *delight in God must be restored to doctrines about God*. Savoring Christ must be restored to seeing Christ. Tender contrition must be restored to tough conviction. Communion with God must be restored to contending for God.

I take that last one from John Owen. He said, “We have communion with God in the doctrines we contend for.”¹ That is his measure of whether he is contending truly. “I must learn to commune with God in the doctrine.” Isn’t that an interesting phrase? Who talks like that today? You have to go back 300 years to find things so powerful on sin and communion with God. “Contending for and communing with God in a doctrine.” Where is there a systematic theology class that helps students realize that when you unpack the incarnation or the nature of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ or the substitutionary atonement, you commune with the Lord as you defend and contend for the doctrine, or else you are not doing it right? No wonder people often don’t want to be around doctrinally driven individuals! They aren’t doing doctrine right. They aren’t emotionally in touch with the truths they teach.

I believe we have a huge problem with this in the Reformed community. Reformed people are so afraid of emotion that they think I am talking about subjectivism. Pastors have a big job here, an impossible job. But we who are pastors have to do this. We have to consider our biblical mandate with regard to modeling for our people what is hindering the arrival of their being effective counselors to each other. I am more concerned about my people counseling each other than I am about my doing counseling myself. I counsel mainly from the pulpit *in order to create counselors*, a couple thousand of them.

Here is what it says about pastors and God’s people in Hebrews 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them [the leaders, elders, pastors] do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” This is an amazing mandate for pastors. Basically, it is saying that if pastors want to love their people and to be an advantage rather than a hindrance to them, they need to be happy. Is that a bad paraphrase? I’d go to the mat with any scholar over that paraphrase! It says, “Let them do this pastoral work—watching over your souls—with joy, not with groaning, because that would be of no advantage to you.”

Pastors, Christian leaders, and biblical counselors, if you want to love and bless people, pursue your joy! If you become indifferent to the pursuit of your own joy, you become indifferent to love, and you can’t equip the church to counsel. That is sin! You cannot love people if you are indifferent to your happiness in the Lord.

Now there are hosts of Reformed and other types who sin when they preach and talk about doctrine by denying in their whole demeanor the preciousness of what they are talking about. The people do not come away saying, “That was the sweetest thing I have ever heard.” The pastor or biblical counselor doesn’t look like he thinks it is sweet or precious. He doesn’t look like he thinks it is life-changing or that it would make him happy. In fact, he seems to be talking in a way that indicates he’s kind of afraid that it *will* make him happy.

Why would anyone want to come back to listen? We all want to be happy! That is exactly the way God made us. The desire to be happy is the same as the desire of being hungry. It is a God-given thing, written right on our hearts. God put Himself as the all-satisfying center of all joy. The reason you are not happy, if you are not, is because you have not gotten to the center yet. Joyful leaders, who commune with the truths they contend for, are crucial to restoring counseling to the church.

The Glory of God

Third, how does this relate to *the glory of God*? This restoring delight to doctrine, affection to reflection, savoring to seeing, communion to contending—how does that relate to the glory of God? The whole book of Hebrews moves toward big issues like hold fast to your confidence, be strong in your encouragement, be joyful in your assurance, be deep in your contentment (Hebrews 3:6; 6:18; 10:34; 13:5). These words—confidence, encouragement, assurance, contentment—are all emotion-laden. The book of Hebrews is all about your joy, persevering in it, and being radically ready to lay down your life to take the gospel where it hasn’t gone.

Why? Because it is all about Christ. Everything in it is about the superiority of Christ’s priesthood, sacrifice, covenant, and mediatorial work. That glorious, grand, Christ-exalting foundation in Hebrews aims to produce confidence and joy and assurance and contentment and the radical lifestyle that flows from it. That means that if you preach, teach, and counsel in a way that people begin to delight in this Christ, He gets all the glory. The book is structured so that the magnificence of Christ’s superiority supports confidence, encouragement, and contentment. The pervasive presence of such positive, satisfying emotions in your church magnifies the foundation for them, Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Edwards said it this way:

So, God glorifies Himself also toward the creatures in two ways: 1. By appearing to...their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself... *God is glorified, not only by His glory's being seen [known, reflected upon], but by its being rejoiced in...* God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory and that it might [be] received both by the mind and the heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.²

You see and understand Christ: doctrine. You trust and love Christ: joy.

On the one hand, you have some Reformed leaders who testify to their ideas about God by crossing every “t,” dotting every “i,” and getting the doctrines right, to which I say, “Absolutely, Amen! I am with you.” On the other hand, you have some Charismatic leaders who are all emotion—get those hands up and clapping, and those feet stomping, and feel something, for goodness’ sake, or God hasn’t arrived! I’m also with them! I hate the cleavage between these two. I am going to do everything within my power while I breathe to help each of these folks see that, according to Edwards, they are giving God only half His glory. *Know Him truly and don't feel Him duly*—He gets half His glory. *Feel Him duly and don't know Him truly*—He gets half His glory. Let's give Him all of His glory, as Jonathan Edwards did.

That means, depending upon which of those “camps” we are in, we must join Paul in his apostolic goal. “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy” (2 Corinthians 1:24). The apostolic goal: work with the church for its joy! Do you do that? Is that your mandate? Do you get up in the morning dreaming about how to work with the church for its joy? Maybe you think that was an isolated slip of Paul's pen, and that he meant to write “faith” there. That's what it sort of sounds like. “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers together with you for your faith.” But he said “joy” instead of “faith.”

In Philippians 1, Paul is not sure whether he is going to live or die. He wants to die to go to be with Jesus, yet he knows he should stay. Why?

“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, *for your progress and joy in the faith*” (Philippians 1:25, emphasis added). Isn’t that amazing? The great writer of the doctrinally unsurpassed book of Romans says his whole life on planet earth is devoted to the joy of the saints. So pastors, Christian leaders, and biblical counselors better not think they have a more noble goal.

We talked about the nature of counseling, and how Word and knowledge have an impact on heart and feeling. Second, we talked about restoring counseling to the church by restoring affection to reflection. Third, we related that to the glory of God by arguing that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Therefore, if you’re a pastor, if you want God to be most glorified in your people, you must satisfy them with God. The agenda that notion sets for how you preach and teach is wondrous. How will you be faithful to the Scripture and get God right? The heart-work can be done only by the Holy Spirit. Joy is His fruit. This goal makes you a desperate pastor (and biblical counselor) because you cannot make people happy in God by yourself. Yes, you can make them happy in church by telling stories, by making them laugh, so they’re glad they came to your church. You can even grow a church without God and without the Holy Spirit. What you cannot do, though, is make people happy in God without God. The human soul is wired to be happy in everything else but God since the Fall. If your goal is to be a worker with and for their joy in God, you are desperately inadequate. This is why we are called to the Word and prayer. He performs; ask Him. We are desperate for His help.

To Love and Be Loved

Fourth, I want to speak concerning what it is to love and be loved. What is it for God to love and for us to be loved by Him? What is it for us to love God and love other people? This is right at the heart of biblical counseling, isn’t it? A sense of being loved, helping people to become loving people, and understanding how God loves us—sinners that we are.

For many years I have been trying to figure out how God’s pursuit of His glory relates to His love for you and me. What I find gets clearer every year, and in recent months has gotten even clearer. For example, a woman came up to me after church, weeping her eyes out in distress over the problems in

her life. At one point in our conversation I asked her, “If you were in a place where you had your family, perfect health, all your favorite foods, and all your favorite recreation, and you didn’t have to feel guilty, would you still want to be there if Jesus wasn’t there?” She cried out, “Yes!” That is where a lot of professing Christians are. The gifts of Christ are what they feel good about, not Christ. Forgiveness feels good, getting rid of guilt feels good, staying out of hell feels good, having a marriage work feels good, having the kids stay off drugs feels good, and having the body made well feels good. Frankly, Jesus can take a vacation. Just give me these things.

But, I don’t think there will be anyone in heaven who doesn’t want to be around Jesus more than they want anything else. This is why I am serious about joy. If you do not have joy in Jesus, you won’t go to heaven.

So, what does it mean to be loved by God? God’s love is almost impossible for Americans to grasp after fifty years of being saturated with love interpreted as enhancing self-esteem. For most Americans, to be loved is *to feel made much of*. That’s the very definition of love. If you do things and say things that make much of me, I feel loved by you. If you don’t, I don’t. That means the love of God is inconceivable and unfeeling by those people. God is not into making much of us. To the degree that we distort the cross into an affirmation of my diamond-in-the-rough value, we lose the love of God. The cross is all about vindicating the righteousness and the glory of God, who has been pleased to enable unworthy sinners to delight in Him.

Why would He treat us so kindly when we are sinners, forgiving all our sins so that we might enjoy making much of Him? I ask this question everywhere I go now, to see if people are American or Christian. I ask, “Do you feel more loved when God makes much of you or do you feel more loved when God, at the cost of His Son, enables you to enjoy making much of Him forever?” These are two profoundly different root sources of satisfaction. One is being made much of; the other is seeing and savoring God and making much of God. Where is the bottom of your satisfaction? Everything in our culture teaches you to make being made much of the bottom of your satisfaction, which is what the devil wants you to do. This has been the case for all of us ever since the Fall. That we might instead be so deeply and inwardly transformed that there might be a new root source to our joy is inconceivable to the natural man! This is why the cross is folly, God is folly, and the church is

folly to the natural man. The spiritual man is fundamentally a person whose deepest root source of joy has been altered from self to God.

Consider John 11: “Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he *whom You love* is sick’” (verses 1-3 NASB, emphasis added). Don’t miss that word “love.” Jesus loves Lazarus. Lazarus is sick. What does love mean? “But when Jesus heard this, He said, ‘This sickness is not to end in death, but for the *glory of God*’” (verse 4 NASB).

There are two massive biblical realities here: love of people and the glory of God. The driving question in my life for the last twenty years has been, “How do they relate?” The passage goes on, “This sickness is not going to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it. Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (verses 4-5 NASB, emphasis added).

This is not a loveless thing going on here. *This is love*. This is a portrait of love, and a portrait of how God the Son will be glorified. Then comes the absolutely, unintelligible conjunction from the standpoint of the world: “When therefore He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was” (verse 6 NASB).³ The “therefore” carries a megaton of theology! Jesus loves Lazarus. Lazarus is sick and he is going to die. It’s a hard thing to die, for someone to drown in his own pneumonia, or for his liver to be eaten away, or his kidneys or stomach to suffer with such horrific pain, and no morphine in those days. I don’t know how Lazarus died, but he was dying, and it was slow. Are You just going to let him die? Why do You not love him? But Jesus says, “I love him. I love you, Martha, and I love you, Mary. I’m not going to fix this problem.” Why? In order that the Son of God may be glorified.

How would you define love on the basis of this text? Here’s my definition:

Love is doing whatever you have to do at whatever cost to yourself in order to help another person stop finding pleasure in being made much of and help them get to the mature, God-exalting, Christ-besotted, joyfully self-sacrificing, self-forgetting delight in making much of God for the sake of others.

Jesus was going to do what Lazarus, Mary, and Martha needed to be able to glorify Him. How can we help our people break free from the love affair of being made much of? How can we all forget this little thing called the ego, and be ravished by what we were made for—God? Nobody takes a trip to stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon in order to enhance his or her self-esteem. The reason people go to the Grand Canyon is that a whisper of common grace remaining in their lives tells them they were made for something great outside themselves that draws the soul out into the most healthy, glorious, self-forgetting experience of delight—call it worship—that the world can scarcely imagine. Love does what is needed to help others love God’s glory in Christ. Counseling is one of the most crucial forms of love. Counseling does what is needed to help others love God’s glory in Christ.⁴

Increased Satisfaction in Christ Jesus: The Role of the Biblical Counselor

Jack Delk

If biblical counseling is about the glory of God, and if God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him, then the role of the biblical counselor is to help increase satisfaction in Jesus Christ. How can we as counselors help those we counsel find their satisfaction in all that God is for us in Christ Jesus? It is a process; often slow, sometimes painstaking, but it is a process. It is a process that requires much patience, love, and often repetition. It is a process that may look like three steps forward and two steps back. But this is the path of the biblical counselor. If our counsel is to be Christ-centered counsel that leads our counsees to increased satisfaction in Jesus, I would suggest three steps toward that one result.

First, God needs to be a part of the story. After listening to a counselee unpack their story there is usually something, or rather someone, left out—namely God. In the midst of their trial, pain, or suffering, God is not mentioned; He is forgotten. As a counselor I ask, “Where is God? Where is He in your struggle? Does He know what you are experiencing, thinking, feeling, desiring?” I want them to see that God *is* part of their story and He’s been there the whole time.

But bringing God into the story is just a first step. Next, I want to help the counselee see that God is sovereign in their story and the goodness of His

sovereign designs. I want my counselees to see God seated on His throne as the Lord of the universe.

To get there I ask another series of questions: “If God is in this story, if He is part of your story, could He have changed it? Could He change your situation, your circumstance right now?” Yes, He could, but He hasn’t. The struggle remains, the pain is there, and the trial is hard.

More questions: “Do you believe that God is good? Is God good as He exercises His sovereignty? Does He want what is best for you?” I want the counselee to see that God is good in His sovereignty. Even in the hardest moments of life, God is good and is working good. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:28-29). As biblical counselors we can say with confidence that God will use their circumstances, their experiences, to conform them to the image of Jesus—that is the good He has promised. Bringing God into the story and affirming God’s sovereignty in it puts God at the center where He belongs. The counselee’s perspective is reoriented from self-focus to God-focus. The counselee sees that their story is not ultimately about them, it is about God; our counsel now becomes God-centered.

Third, I want to help the counselee see that their story is part of something much bigger than themselves; it is part of God’s grand narrative of redemption. It is about God’s glory and fame. Although their story may seem exceedingly small and insignificant compared to all that God is doing throughout time and history, it is important to God. God is concerned and intimately involved in their story because it is part of His story, part of what He is doing. Because the larger story is primarily about God and His glory, the counselee can be confident that God is over every minute detail because God is jealous for His own fame and reputation, about what the counselee’s story says about Him.

As a biblical counselor I want to encourage my counselee that the Bible is relevant to their struggle. The Bible speaks to their experience. The Bible deals with life at both its best and its worst. The Bible talks about betrayal. The Bible talks about sin and its consequences. The Bible talks about conflict, suffering, and dysfunctional families. The Bible talks about illness and physical ailments. And the Bible is full of wonderfully encouraging, God-glorifying

stories of redemption, restoration, healing, and reconciliation in the lives of imperfect, broken people, people just like them. The counselees' names may not be written in the pages of their Bible, but if they are in Christ, their story is part of God's grand narrative of redemption. And the climax of that narrative is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, where all lasting joy is found.

We are all weak sinners in need of a Savior; Jesus Christ is that Savior. What's more, Jesus knows us. He has experienced our temptations and is familiar with our suffering.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

We have a Savior who will lead us to God without fear or shame. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

There is hope in the gospel. There is healing in the gospel. There is power in the gospel. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). There is inexpressible joy in the gospel. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Psalm 34:8). Hearts are drawn to the heavens in worship. Together we are satisfied in all that God is for us in Christ Jesus. We lead our counselees to become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people and lovers of God, no matter the struggles and crises they are in or encounter in the future. This doesn't mean that pain, suffering, or sin is insignificant; it is real. Pain hurts, struggles are hard, and sin flowing from us and coming at us is a reality of the human experience. But seeing God at the center, receiving the illuminating truth of His Word, experiencing God's grace in the gospel in the past gives hope for the present and the future. The earth may shake, dust may swirl all around us, but this we know: When the quaking stops and the dust settles, Jesus will still be on His throne, ruling, reigning, and interceding for His own.