

## REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN COUNSELING

One of the most powerful ways to help counselees see God is to embody His presence, His grace, and His love in our relationship with them.

In so doing, we are in reality making the invisible Christ visible to people who desperately need to see Him.

Being His ambassador means following His example in our words, our attitudes, and our methods.

1. To do so we must be students of the Gospel accounts of His teachings and interactions with those He met.

God is **for** people and **against** sin. (Psalm 118:6; Romans 8:31-39)

He came that lost sinners might be saved—that **was** and **is** His agenda. (Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9)

As His ambassadors, we are to bring people to the place where they see and understand this before anything else. (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

### Key Scriptures:

#### **John 13:34-35**

“I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another.”

#### **Galatians 6:2**

“Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Thirteen times in the New Testament we receive the admonition that, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to love one another just as Jesus Himself has loved us. It is this feature which marks the Christian life more than any other.

**God's purpose in sending Christ was to redeem man—and still is.**

### Elements of Redemption

- Conviction/Conversion
  - Confession/Repentance
  - Justification
  - Adoption
  - Sanctification
1. The Holy Spirit **convicts** a person of their sin and sinfulness. (John 16:13-15)  
  
He then convinces them of their need of a Savior (**conversion**).  
  
Until there has been a change of heart about God's holiness and man's unrighteousness, conversion does not take place.
  2. Upon this conviction/conversion, the person then **confesses** their sin and **repents** of their sinfulness. (1 John 1:9)  
  
Repentance is a turning toward God when the person was living away from God.  
  
Repentance must be revisited in the life of the believer—sometimes often.
  3. Having Christ's righteousness credited to one's account (**justification**) is *not* wiping the slate clean—it is being regarded and treated as if God's law has always been perfectly obeyed.

Being declared righteous reconciles us to God and removes all warrant for fighting against God. (Romans 5:1-2)

4. Being **adopted** as His children (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5), we become co-inheritors with Christ.

This new citizenship requires us to and sanctions our right to live life fully and freely in loving obedience to the will of the Father.

5. The process of being conformed more every day into the same character as Christ has (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18) is known as **sanctification**.

All of these elements combined comprise God's redemptive plan.

### **Being Redemptive**

God's redemptive activity always takes place **within relationships**.

As His ambassadors, it falls to us to develop redemptive relationships with others—especially in the context of Biblical Counseling.

1. *Enter* their world.
2. *Incarnate* the love of Christ.
3. *Identify* with their suffering.
4. *Accept*, but with an agenda.

Convey to them they have been **heard**, their heart has been **understood**, and you will **stand with** them.

## ***COURAGEOUS LISTENING***

**Courageous listening** is the readiness to enter into the task of listening with the expectation and willingness to be changed by what you hear. It takes a deep love for and trust in Christ, a deep love for others, and a great deal of courage.

- Encourage them to share their story—all of it.
- Listen well and completely—no interruptions except to clarify.
- Express shared insights (“That must have made you sad/angry/afraid”, “That was wrong of them”, etc.)
- Give encouragement (“I think you are brave,” “Thank you for sharing that very difficult story,” etc.)
- No Biblical platitudes, quick solutions, or too-fast assumptions.
- Be willing to cry with them in their sadness.

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-5**

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies **God of all comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our affliction so that we will be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God.”

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our **comfort** is abundant through Christ.

- The purpose in our suffering is not for us but for others.
- People need to know they are not alone in what they suffered.
- Tactful, tactical telling of part of your own story can be very helpful.

The tale needs to be:

- Applicable
- Uncomplicated
- Complete (without being overly detailed)
- Honest
- God-centered

**Redemptive truth** is made real and welcome when it conveys that we “get them” and they are not alone.

**Redemptive truth** must always point to God's redemptive purpose in what the person is struggling with, no matter how heinous the story.

## ***COUNSELING FOR TRUE TRANSFORMATION***

### **Accepting, But With an Agenda**

Our agenda, once again, is to be an ambassador of God's reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ.

- Acceptance is not “co-signing” ungodliness (refuse to condemn; refuse to condone).
- Acceptance is not minimizing or absolving of responsibility.
- Acceptance is conveying the message that no matter what has happened, God is not against them.
- As Christ's ambassadors, it falls to us to guide the counselee toward Biblical, transformational change.
- To have Christ's mind about the situation and to allow God to bring about the “conforming to the image of His Son” that He intends, the counselor will need to assign homework, no matter how simple.
- The goal is to focus their attention on God; not on the counselor and not on the problem.
- Homework also helps ensure they will be invested in the process. We cannot be more invested in their transformation than they are.

The counselor:

- Gathers data
- Sorts and interprets the data
- Diagnoses the problem(s)
- Outlines a treatment (restorative) plan

## “Treatment” Plan

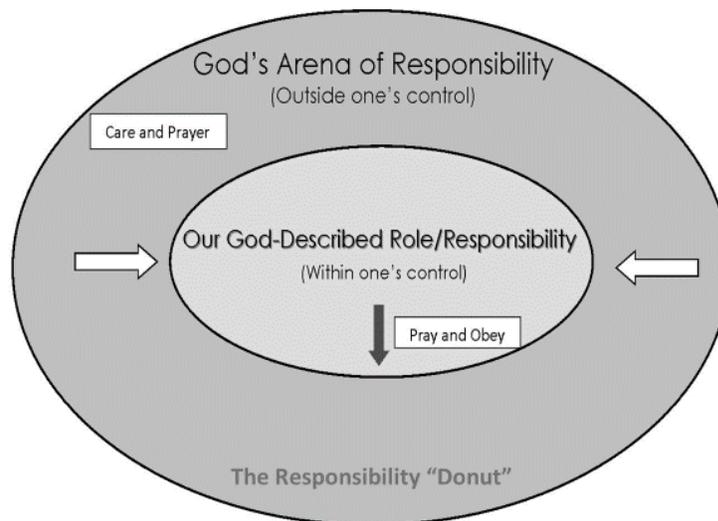
2 Timothy 3:16-17

- **Teaching** [instruction, education]
- **Reproof** [rebuke, reprimand, scold]
- **Correction** [lay bare, expose error]
- Training in righteousness [focus of homework]

Focus on outcomes instead of activities.

## *RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY*

### Clarify Responsibility



**Inner Circle:** These are ours and cannot be relinquished to anyone else.

**Outer Circle:** These are God's and, while we can care about them and pray about them, they are His to control and we must submit them to Him.

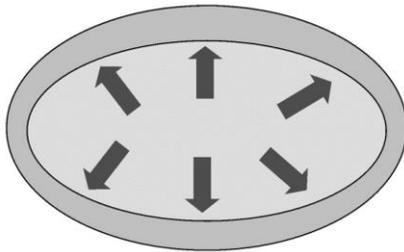
**White Arrows:** The attempt to shrink one's responsibility.

**Dark Arrow:** The attempt to expand one's responsibility.

As a Biblical counselor, you **clarify** whose responsibilities are whose.

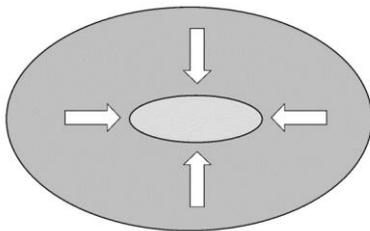
Guide the counselee away from **conflation**, **enmeshing**, and **entanglements**.

- **Conflating** God's responsibility with our responsibility, or our responsibility with that of someone else's, makes life "out of order", which causes it to be unsuccessful and to not honor God or reflect His glory.
- **Enmeshing** one's life and identity with someone else's creates **entanglements** that are difficult to sort through and to separate.



**Expanded circle results in:**

- Mini-messiah lifestyle;
- Unmet expectations;
- Unforgiveness;
- Eventual bitterness.



**Deflated circles results in:**

- Unfaithful prayer;
- Passive trust;
- Loss of faith.

# ***HOMWORK AND ACCOUNTABILITY***

We are, in counseling, bringing a person to a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Him, obedience to Him, and walking with Him are our primary change objectives.

The task of the Biblical counselor is to call for change – a change of mind and heart leading to a change of life.

A person lives what they *believe* – they cannot do otherwise.

What we saturate our minds with is what we believe.

Biblical change only takes place when what a person **saturates** their mind with and what that person **believes** has changed.

## **Purpose of Homework:**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

- Teaching [instruction, education]
- Reproof [rebuke, reprimand, scold]
- Correction [lay bare, expose error]
- **Training in righteousness [disciplined]:** Give homework, develop action plans, and do consistent follow-up.

## **Underlying Doctrines**

**Homework:** One methodological distinctive of Biblical counseling is the regular use of homework. Good, well-tailored homework can play a significant part in the counseling and transformational change process.

For the Biblical counselor theology is not only a matter of the **content** of faith and practice. Biblical, exegetically-derived theology also addresses the **process** of changing beliefs and behaviors.

This includes both counseling methods (from the counselor's side of the process) and progressive sanctification (from the counselee's side). These methods of Biblical counseling emerge out of a robust Scriptural theology.

What the Biblical counselor *does* in counseling—and has counselees do—must be as biblically consistent as what he or she says.

Homework is one of those methods that is a logical and practical extension of the beliefs that make Biblical counseling distinctive.

There are five basic doctrines that drive and inform the Biblical counselor's use of homework:

- Doctrine of Scripture
- Doctrine of Human Responsibility
- Doctrine of God
- Doctrine of Sin
- Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification

Our Doctrine of Scripture calls for homework that causes the Word of God to be incorporated into the life of the counselee.

- (Introduce, Investigate, Integrate, Indwell)
  - Introduce them to the Word of God: Teach them about its importance, how to use simple study tools, etc.
  - Have them investigate what the Scriptures have to say about their situation.
  - Help them Integrate: Get them memorizing/saturating Scripture and changing what they believe about God, themselves, others, and their situation.
  - The Indwelling Christ: Make sure they have accepted Christ, that they understand His indwelling, and that they are learning how to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

Our Doctrine of Human Responsibility calls for homework that causes the counselee to examine and probe their ways (Lamentations 3:41)

- Gets us away from blame-shifting (Inner-Child, co-dependent, dysfunctional, father-wound/mother-wound systems). Causes the counselee to become actively involved in examining self and making changes out of hope and dependency on God.

Our Doctrine of God calls for homework that causes the counselee to encounter, consider, and grow to know and love God.

- It is through this kind of homework that a counselee begins to learn to surrender to and be guided by the indwelling Christ. If they are as yet not saved, this process can cause their minds to be engulfed in pondering God's truth-claims in His Word.

Our Doctrine of Sin calls for homework that causes the counselee to examine their life and situation using Biblical categories and develop a Biblical approach to "put-off/put-on".

- Sin is identified, God's alternatives are elucidated, and specific skills for dealing righteously with the problems of life are developed.

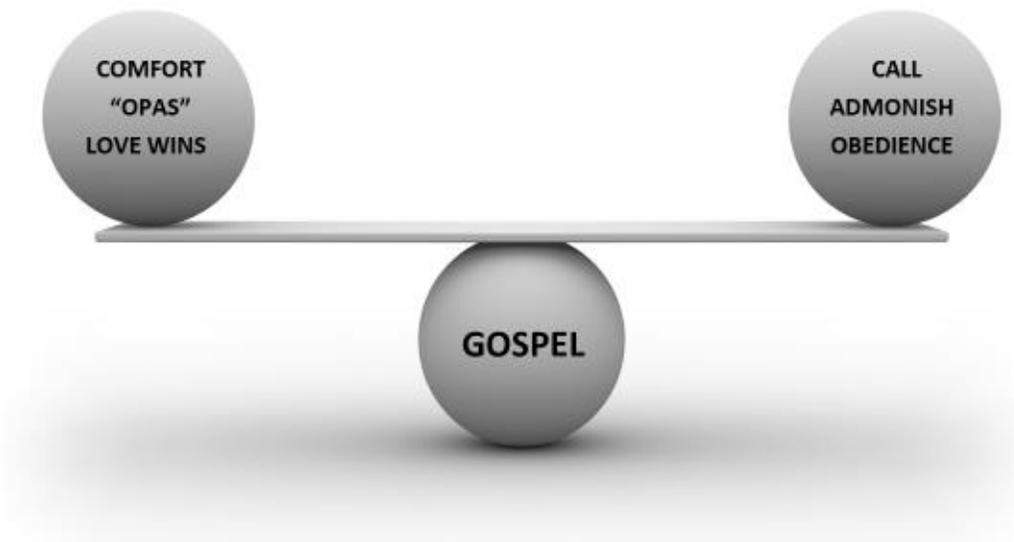
Our Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification calls for homework that causes the counselee to actively engage in transformational change in an ongoing way.

- Homework helps the counselee embrace and fulfill their part in their life-long journey of being made more like Christ each and every day. (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:29; Romans 12:2)

## Homework S.M.A.R.T.S.

- **S**pecific
- **M**easureable
- **A**greed upon
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-**S**pecific

## A BALANCED GOSPEL



(OPAS = "Once Prayed, Always Saved")



## HOMEWORK TOOLS AND METHODS

The “Homework Tools and Methods” described here are used both independently of interdependently with each other, depending on the specifics of the counseling situation.

It takes prayer and practice to develop the counselor’s adeptness at incorporating these methods for involving the counselee in their own transformational change process. The following list is exemplary, not exhaustive. The counselor will discover others as they journey along this path of ministry.

When the counselor has done well at the **Love, Know, Speak** aspects of the counseling relationship, he or she will find that the idea for the best homework to assign seems to come out almost naturally.

### Tools

- ∞ Reading Assignments
- ∞ Writing Assignments
- ∞ Saturating/Memorizing
- ∞ Word/Topical Studies
- ∞ Essay Evaluation
- ∞ “Log List”
- ∞ Art Projects
- ∞ Journaling
- ∞ Letter Writing
- ∞ Targeted (well-aimed) Conversations
- ∞ Enlisting Others

### Reading Assignments

The goal of reading assignments is to engage the counselee’s mind in investigating and examining their situation in relation to God’s Word and the writings of others familiar with situations like theirs.

- Specific Scriptures
- Bible stories
- Biblical character studies
- Topic-specific extra-biblical materials (Christian and carefully selected non-Christian). This can tie-in with and parallel “Word/Topical studies” below.
  - Books/booklets
  - Bible studies
  - Articles
  - Blogs
  - Websites

### Writing Assignments

This general category of homework has as its goal a more in-depth involvement by the counselee in examining and sharing their thoughts, emotions, motivation, perceptions, fears, successes, detail of their situation, interpersonal interactions, etc. This incorporates several of the specific assignments detailed further on.

- Journaling
- Lists (goal lists, task lists, priorities lists, pressure points, etc.)
- Temptation Plan (See sample)
- Letters
- Homework handouts (See samples)

### Saturating/Memorizing

As a Biblical counselor, you know that everyone lives out what they believe to be true. In order to have a transformed life in Christ, one's underlying beliefs must be converted into those that are consistent with

the Word of God. This doesn't happen without the Word being engrafted into a person's thinking first.

Some of the most common topics we are confronted with (as you read through this list, try to recall verses or passages of Scripture that address these matters):

- Hopelessness
- Discouragement
- Fear and Anxiety
- Temptation/Trials
- Shame/Low Self-Image
- Relationships
- Unforgiveness
- Anger
- Pride
- Sense of Entitlement
- Lust
- Self-Control
- Depression

### Word/Topical Studies

Often a counselee will have little or no clear understanding about their situation from God's perspective. Word studies and topical studies can be a very helpful tool for both **speaking** truth into their life as well as launching the transformational **do** of the counseling process.

### Essay Evaluation

When used in conjunction with other homework, this tool is used to help a counselee examine and share important details of their life on a beneath-the-surface manner. Some examples:

- "I am unhappy in my life because..."

- “The most important thing in my life right now is...”
- “My marriage would be better if only ...”
- “Growing up in my home was like ...”
- “The thing that I am most afraid of in life right now is ...”
- “I feel hopeless because ...”
- “My thoughts about God are ...”
- “I have tried to deal with this problem in these ways:”
- “If you could press a button and make your life just the way you wanted it, what would it look like?”
- “No matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, these are the things that never change:”

### “Log Lists”

Used alone or in conjunction with journaling, this tool is effective in getting counselees engaged in the initial steps of actually becoming Biblical counselees.

“Log Lists” get their focus where it needs to be: on where they stand with God in their situation.

- Example: “Write down the things you do and say that could be contributing to the problem. Focus on your own attitudes, words, and behaviors—not those of anyone else involved.”

### Art Projects

Many times, a counselee is better able to communicate in pictures than with words. Pictures, collages, even modeling clay renderings can help a counselee give expression to thoughts and emotions that have been confusing or remained too long unvoiced. Have them interpret their project for you.

## Journaling

Perhaps one of the most consistently fruit-producing homework tool a counselor can employ, journaling can be used in a variety of ways:

- Tracking details of the occurrence of incidents;
- Charting themes and patterns;
- Clearing thinking and reveling all of the thoughts and emotions involved;
- Discovering deeper significance to past and present experiences;
- “Speaking” God's thoughts as one's own.
- Prayers: writing out prayers can be an effective way of “journaling.”

## Letter Writing

A variation of the Journaling Exercise, letter writing can provide opportunity for a counselee to give expression to thoughts and emotions that have caused too much fear or shame to be said out loud. The letter can be meant for the counselee or someone else, depending on the situation that needs to be addressed. This can be a useful tool all along the counseling process, from data gathering to the end. In most cases, **this letter is never intended to be sent.**

## Targeted (well-aimed) Conversations

At times a counselee will need to be assigned homework that puts them in face-to-face conversation with someone involved in their situation in a manner that is well thought-out and planned in advance. The goal is to bring to equip the counselee to speak the truth in love when to do so **will not bring more harm than good.**

It is not uncommon for a person to keep things to themselves for very long periods of time, leading to unforgiveness, anger, and bitterness, as well as toxic shame.

### Enlisting Others

As we have discussed often, Biblical counseling is a community investment. The counselor is only one part of the Body of Christ the Redeemer intends to use as His instrument to bringing healing and transformational change into the lives of His children.

In assigning this type of homework, the goal is to have the counselee prayerfully enlist the involvement of other mature, healthy believers in their transformation. What takes place in each of our lives impacts the entire Body (1 Corinthians 12:20, 26-27).

It is also important to keep in mind that the counseling relationship is generally only for a season, so the counselee needs to be engrafted in to a healthy local fellowship where he or she can continue to “be transformed into the image of His Son.”