

## Everybody Integrates: Biblical Counseling and the Use of Extrabiblical Material

Nate Brooks

*Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary*

**Abstract:** *Biblical counseling as a discipline has often identified itself as being an approach to counseling that stands opposed to integration. This article draws a distinction between Integrationism as a theoretical approach to Christian counseling and the actual process of integrating extrabiblical material into one's practice of counseling. It then shows that Jay Adams, Wayne Mack, and Heath Lambert, past and current leaders within the traditional-nouthetic approach to counseling, all integrate significant amounts of extrabiblical material into their counseling, including material derived from secular psychology. Given that all counselors must integrate material from Scripture and from sources external to Scripture, the article concludes by affirming the need for biblical counselors to have a robust theory of integration*

**Key Words:** *biblical counseling, common grace, Heath Lambert, integration, Jay Adams, psychology, skills, theology, Wayne Mack*

The word “integration” is not a friendly word within the discipline of biblical counseling. Biblical counseling literature often portrays “Integrationists” as those who err by believing that “the biblical text” is little more than “a shallow and imprecise psychology” for counseling.<sup>1</sup> Integrationists’ compromised viewpoint stands in contradistinction to biblical counselors whose approach to counseling is based on the faithful belief that “the Bible is a sufficient counseling resource.”<sup>2</sup>

The labels of “Integrationism” and “biblical counseling” are helpful in distinguishing between two different theoretical approaches towards Christian counseling.<sup>3</sup> However, I wonder if these names can serve to cloak an important reality for both perspectives: Integrationism is no less

<sup>1</sup> John Street, “Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 30.

<sup>3</sup> See Eric Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

reliant upon a theological method than is biblical counseling, and biblical counseling is no less reliant upon a method of integration than is Integrationism.<sup>4</sup>

The assertion that both biblical counseling and Integrationism are dependent upon theological method is well-attested within relevant literature. Biblical counseling understands itself as an explicitly biblical-theological discipline, an affirmation that can be seen in its very name, and biblical counselors have written on this point extensively.<sup>5</sup> While Integrationists have been slower to develop an explicit theological backing for their practices, recent years have seen an increase in this kind of work.<sup>6</sup> Biblical counselors and Integrationists come to different theological conclusions in both theory-building and in clinical application at times. However, current literature in both fields acknowledge the centrality of robust theology for a healthy approach to counseling no matter one’s theoretical orientation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this essay I will use a capitalized term (Integration) to refer to the discipline and an uncapitalized term (integration) to refer to the act of integrating material from multiple domains of knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> For a representative sample, see Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) and Ed Hinson and Howard Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient: The Bible and Christian Counseling* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Callaway and Whitney note, “Much of the psychology/theology integration literature is not only *not* integrated ... but also suffers from somewhat thin and underdeveloped notions of the available theological resources and of the possible contributions that theology might make to psychology.” Kutter Callaway and William B. Whitney, *Theology for Psychology and Counseling: An Invitation to Holistic Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 5. See also Mark McMin, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 11–48.

<sup>7</sup> Compare, for instance, the agreement between Kutter Callaway and Heath Lambert. Callaway writes to psychologists, “Psychologists ... are always ... doing theology. As a result, they are, in fact, already theologians.... So the question isn’t so much about whether you are doing theology.... Instead, the question is about the depth, rigor, and critical self-awareness you bring to a task in which you are always already engaged.” Heath Lambert writes, “Counseling is a theological discipline.... The only question is whether a counselor adopts a theological vision of reality that God believes is faithful—or unfaithful. We cannot chose to have a vision of reality that is *not* theological” (*Theology for Psychology*, 2). Lambert writes to biblical counselors, “Understanding that counseling requires some vision of life is crucial to understanding the theological nature of counseling. The reason is that such a vision of reality is *always* theological” (*Theology of Biblical counseling*, 17; italics original).

Turning to the topic of integrative method, Integrationists have unsurprisingly produced a great deal of literature regarding the relationship between Christian practice and psychological theories.<sup>8</sup> Biblical counselors, on the other hand, have most commonly approached secular psychology with a hostile posture. Because the default stance has historically been one of rejection under the banner of Scriptural sufficiency, biblical counseling is largely devoid of published self-conscious reflections regarding the integrative process.<sup>9</sup>

This article will argue that biblical counselors of necessity incorporate material drawn from domains of knowledge outside of Scripture, thereby requiring biblical counseling to establish its own robust theory of integration.<sup>10</sup> “Integration” used in this way must be understood as an act and not theoretical perspective—it is the process of drawing material together from a variety of sources, including but not limited to secular psychology, into a coherent and helpful approach to counseling. I will demonstrate that the act of integration is performed by all biblical counselors by demonstrating pervasive use of knowledge sourced from domains other

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<sup>8</sup> See John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Mark R. McMinn and Clark D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2017); Megan Anna Neff and Mark McMinn, *Embodying Integration: A Fresh Look at Christianity in the Therapy Room* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> David Powlison provides one of the only self-aware discussions of biblical-counseling-as-psychology in David Powlison, “A Biblical Counseling View,” in *Psychology and Christianity: 5 Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric Johnson (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2010), 245–73. James Hurley and James Berry press David Powlison and Ed Welch over biblical counseling’s lack of interest in developing specific processes for using material found in domains outside of Scripture in their 1997 dialogue. See James B. Hurley and James T. Berry, “Response to Welch and Powlison” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 16.4 (1997): 350–62.

<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that the term “biblical counseling” has a certain amount of elasticity to it. Significant discussion exists over whether biblical counseling is a unified field, or if there are fundamentally different approaches grouped together under an overarching banner. This discussion falls outside the purview of this article; however, I find Eric Johnson’s distinction between traditional-nouthetic biblical counseling and progressive biblical counseling helpful. See Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 109–11. Heath Lambert provides an alternative perspective in Heath Lambert, *Biblical Counseling After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121–36. I address the specifics of David Powlison’s writings on psychology in Nate Brooks, “What Did David Powlison Teach about Scripture and Psychology?,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition*. <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/10/20/what-did-david-powlison-teach-about-scripture-and-psychology/> (accessed 2/5/24).

than Scripture throughout the work of three traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors: Jay Adams, Wayne Mack, and Heath Lambert. I have chosen these three authors because they stand in the stream of biblical counseling thought that most actively resists the incorporation of material outside of Scripture into counseling. If even traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors integrate extrabiblical material into their counseling practice, other streams within biblical counseling certainly do so as well.

To be clear, this article is not a clandestine assault upon biblical counseling. I write not as an outside observer, but as practitioner and professor within the biblical counseling tradition. My aim in this article is to highlight a weakness in biblical counseling’s philosophy that leads to confusion in hopes that further work will be done to close a gap that reduces the quality of care offered to God’s people.

### The Sufficiency of Scripture

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has long been a watchword within the biblical counseling movement. Most major biblical counseling organizations use the term in their doctrinal or methodological commitments to explain the relationship between Scripture and counseling.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Jay Adams infrequently used the term within his major writings. His landmark 1970 work *Competent to Counsel* never uses the term or its derivatives, and within *More than Redemption, A Christian’s Counselor’s Manual*, and *Shepherding God’s Flock* the only use is a scant reference to the Bible being “sufficient” for understanding what we need to know about God’s will.

Adams first significantly used the term in his 1986 book *How to Help People Change*. Here Adams understands 2 Tim 3:17 to declare that a counselor “need never feel inadequate so long as he has the Bible. If he is inadequate, it is not because the Bible is inadequate but simply because he does not know his Bible adequately. The Bible has what he needs to meet all demands in counseling.”<sup>12</sup> Adams quickly acknowledged that the Scriptures do not contain all pieces of knowledge available to humanity, as it is not a “textbook for electrical engineering, shipbuilding, aeronautics, or a

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<sup>11</sup> See Biblical Counseling Coalition, “Confessional Statement;” Association of Certified Biblical Counseling, “Standards of Conduct,” I.A.; International Association of Biblical Counselors, “IABC Statement of Faith.”

<sup>12</sup> Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 30. In this book, Adams quotes his 1982 journal article, “Integration” within the *Journal of Pastoral Practice*. The focus of his 1982 article is integration, and the 1986 book expands his article’s discussion of sufficiency.

hundred-and-one-other disciplines.” However, because the Scriptures are written as a “textbook for living, and for changing our living to conform to God’s requirements” a counselor can know that “in the pages of Scripture are stowed every principle [they] might ever need to perform [their] tasks.”<sup>13</sup> For Adams, any piece of information that could be discovered within secular psychology was already in the Scriptures: “If it is a truth that is *necessary* to counseling, it will be found already *in a purer form* in the Bible.... What it may serve the function of doing is alerting the counselor to the need to study the matter to which it pertains more fully *in the Scriptures*.”<sup>14</sup>

Many later biblical counselors followed in Adams’s footsteps regarding their understanding of the doctrine of sufficiency. Wayne Mack declares, “I reject the idea that Biblical counselors need extrabiblical insights to do truly effective counseling.... Scripture is not silent about the matter of its sufficiency for both understanding man and his non-physical problems, and resolving those problems.”<sup>15</sup> Heath Lambert insists that “God gave us a Bible that is sufficient for counseling and does not need to be supplemented by the findings of common grace.”<sup>16</sup>

This formulation of the doctrine of biblical sufficiency is maximalist in nature. Common grace, and therefore the subcategory of secular psychology, is ultimately irrelevant to the practice of counseling. According to these authors, the Bible contains everything necessary for theory building and for the practice of counseling. Because counseling is a spiritual

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<sup>13</sup> Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 39 (italics original).

<sup>15</sup> Wayne Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling,” in *Totally Sufficient*, ed. Ed Hindson and Howard Eyrich (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2004): 25–51, 17, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Lambert, *Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 100. Lambert develops this further in his book *Biblical Counseling and Common Grace* (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2023). Here Lambert writes specifically of one trauma-informed practice: “I ... see no reason to quibble with the claim that ice cubes could have a ‘grounding’ effect in keeping traumatized individuals from disassociating” (p. 65). However, despite his acknowledgement that such practices could be useful and helpful, he affirms that “Nothing about the existence of approaches outside of Scripture does anything to erode the sufficient resources in Scripture.... Scripture addresses counseling-related problems to such an extent that no other resources are required for counseling content” (p. 67). Indeed, it appears he views such strategies as a waste of time, as “Time in counseling is a zero-sum game. The more time we spend in counseling working with secular resources, the less time we will be able to spend unpacking the glorious truths of the Scriptures.... I am ready to promise that eternity will reveal countless counselees who would gladly trade their time engaging such therapies, regardless of any common grace value they may hold, for time spent lingering over the Word of God” (pp. 73–74).

discipline, material from non-Christian approaches is largely irrelevant as “Jesus Christ was the world’s wonderful Counselor. In no way was His counseling dependent on the ‘findings of psychology.’”<sup>17</sup>

I have provided a more detailed theological discussion about common grace and the nature of counseling elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Rather than reduplicate this discussion here, this article will remain focused on demonstrating that a formal rejection of common grace insights for counseling cannot be sustained in the actual practice of counseling, thus necessitating a theologically robust theory of integrating material from the Scriptures and other domains of knowledge.

### The Ad-Hoc Importation of Extra-Biblical Material

Every counseling theory must be made practicable, and this practice of necessity involves using material not explicitly taught within the pages of Scripture. Even those advocating a maximalist version of biblical sufficiency incorporate vast amounts of material from other domains than Scripture itself. This task requires integration—the placing together of material from multiple domains into a coherent, workable schema.

### Jay Adams

The reality of integration can immediately be seen within the work of Jay Adams.<sup>19</sup> While the core of Adams’s transformational system was drawn from the exegesis of biblical texts, the actual practice of nouthetic counseling is littered with processes and practices drawn from domains other than Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Nate Brooks, “Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps Us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency” (Convocation, Reformed Theological Seminary Charlotte, 08.30.22), <https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/>.

<sup>19</sup> Adams’s work here is surveyed in depth because of the breadth of his writing on practical counseling topics.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Kellemen has recently raised the question of how much Adams was influenced by O. Hobart Mowrer rather than simply exegeting texts of Scripture to develop his system of Nouthetic Counseling. I find Kellemen’s preliminary work to be a helpful extension of this conversation, recognizing that Adams’s own reading of texts happened within the context of his own psychological influences. See Bob Kellemen, “Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement: O. Hobart Mowrer,” RPM Ministries. <https://rpmministries.org/2023/10/o-hobart-mowrer-the-man-who-influenced-the-early-nouthetic-counseling-movement/> (accessed 2/5/24).

Consider the breadth of Adams's suggestions to counselors. He suggested that pastors (the primary practitioners of nouthetic counseling in Adams's mind) "chalk out certain hours for counseling," especially afternoon hours since "men ... can take off from work to see other [professionals]; they will do the same for you."<sup>21</sup> Adams's work is littered with references to a secretary who handles various kinds of counseling-related matters and phone calls—which presupposes that having a secretary is normal within nouthetic counseling environments.<sup>22</sup> Adams gave detailed suggestions and instructions on the need to review homework at the beginning of sessions,<sup>23</sup> interpreting body language and nonverbal cues,<sup>24</sup> taking notes,<sup>25</sup> how to ask relevant questions,<sup>26</sup> transitioning between stages of counseling, and ending the counseling relationship.

Adams believed quite strongly in the usefulness of intake documents, which he labeled the Personal Data Inventory (P.D.I.). The P.D.I. covered a wide range of topics, including an individual's familial and spiritual backgrounds, prior counseling experiences, understanding of the problem, and relevant medical issues, amid other things. "Let me suggest," Adams adjured, "that you *always* use a P.D.I. in *every* counseling case ... as you do, you will discover that *in most cases* you actually have far less information than you may have supposed."<sup>27</sup> (Quite naturally, this advice did not apply in cases of suicide or other crisis scenarios).<sup>28</sup>

Built into nouthetic counseling was the expectation that homework would be assigned to counselees. Adams was quite insistent that homework be completed, urging counselors, "One simply may not barrel ahead toward his next counseling goal, giving new homework, when the previous week's homework is yet incomplete. Better to stick to what has been assigned already, discover what got in the way, lay plans for getting it done this time, and reassigning it."<sup>29</sup>

A full review of all material used by Adams that originated from domains outside of Scripture exceeds the limits of this article. However, this representative sample demonstrates that Adams's approach to counseling

<sup>21</sup> Jay Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 40.

<sup>22</sup> Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 235.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 257–58.

<sup>25</sup> Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 263–66.

<sup>26</sup> Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 274–76.

<sup>27</sup> Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Jay Adams, *Lectures on Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1977), 105.

<sup>29</sup> Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 62–63.

pervasively incorporated material from outside of Scripture. Adams rejected what he saw to be unbiblical, and used what he found to be consistent with the teachings of Scripture.<sup>30</sup>

### Wayne Mack

Though not as verbose as Adams, Wayne Mack also wrote extensively on the practicalities of counseling. He penned the seven core methodological chapters in the John MacArthur Library volume on pastoral counseling. There he notes that in order to help people with their problems, counselors must gather data "in at least six areas: physical state, resources, emotions, actions, concepts, and historical background."<sup>31</sup> In order to gather this data, Mack follows Adams in recommending the use of a Personal Data Inventory form and provides a sample form for his readers.<sup>32</sup> Data gathering by questioning should focus on "what" questions rather than "why" questions, and open questions are preferred over closed questions.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking of nonverbal data, Mack notes that the way a family positions themselves in a counseling room can communicate relational alliances.<sup>34</sup> Physical actions such as squeezing chair handles or looking at the floor when a particular issue is raised likewise "reveal information that will be useful to help counselees change."<sup>35</sup> Likewise "paralinguistic communication" such as "tone of voice" and a counselee's willingness or unwillingness to talk about particular issues "can provide as much information as merely concentrating on what the counselees say."<sup>36</sup>

Counselee resistance may be categorized as "overt and covert." While overt resistance is rather obvious, Mack sees covert resistance as demonstrated through absenteeism, failure to complete homework assignments,

<sup>30</sup> More debated is the influence of O. Hobart Mowrer on Jay Adams. Bob Kellemen outlines the case for Adams being significantly influenced by Mowrer in his counseling model. Kellemen quotes David Powlison as saying, "Mowrer had given Adams the contours of a counseling model and had set him in motion. ... Adams began implementing what he had learned from Mowrer and what he was discovering in his Bible" ("Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement").

<sup>31</sup> Wayne Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 132.

<sup>32</sup> Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 140.

<sup>33</sup> Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 141–42.

<sup>34</sup> Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 144–45.

<sup>35</sup> Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 145.

<sup>36</sup> Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 145.

distancing from the counselor, threat making, intimidation, and manipulation through tears or flattery.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the incorporation of all these extrabiblical observations, Mack also frequently employs the use of “scaling” as a technique within counseling. His *Preparing for Marriage God’s Way* is largely centered around ranking oneself and one’s partner across hundreds of various metrics. Mack’s use of scaling is consistent with the use of scaling in secular counseling manuals.<sup>38</sup> Like Adams, Mack’s practice of counseling is replete with examples of using material drawn from sources other than the Scriptures, with Mack serving to arbitrate whether a given strategy or tool conformed to biblical truth or ran afoul of it.

### Heath Lambert

Heath Lambert’s book on pornography addiction contains many interventions that exceed the data found within text of Scripture. The chapter on “Radical Measures” insists that a man or woman caught in sexual sin must give their accountability partner any device that can play movies and give them total access to their home—including keys and a permission to “enter at any point to do a spot-check of your residence and your car.”<sup>39</sup> GPS locations should be shared with the accountability partner, as well as receipts.<sup>40</sup> To be clear, these moral imperatives are a biblical mandate to Lambert—punctuated by words like “should” and “need” throughout the text of his book. Lambert clearly lays out his rationale for such interventions, noting that “You will think twice about visiting a place you shouldn’t if you know your accountability partner can tell you were there.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the purpose of these measures is to create an aversive environment for negative behavior. Once again, this parallels common secular techniques.

<sup>37</sup> Wayne Mack, “Biblical Counseling and Inducement,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 183–84.

<sup>38</sup> Wayne Mack, *Preparing for Marriage God’s Way: A Step-by-Step Guide for Marriage Success Before and After the Wedding*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013). See Bradley T. Erford, *45 Techniques Every Counselor Should Know*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2019), 19–33 for an example of scaling taught in a secular counseling skills book. In a personal anecdote, my wife and I used Mack’s marriage guide as part of our premarital counseling. While it darn near killed us off by its thoroughness, it also proved to be very helpful in building a strong foundation for working through challenges in our married life.

<sup>39</sup> Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 67.

<sup>40</sup> Lambert, *Finally Free*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Lambert, *Finally Free*, 68.

Elsewhere Lambert writes of caring for a woman suffering from postpartum depression and homicidal ideation towards her newborn. Lambert triages the situation by declaring, “This was not the time for much of anything on her part except for sleep and nourishment.”<sup>42</sup> He also relieves the wife of any childcare responsibilities immediately for the rest of the day, asking the husband to take the next day off.<sup>43</sup>

Lambert’s work on ACBC’s *Truth for Life* podcast demonstrates a similar pattern of using material from domains outside of Scripture. Speaking of suicide intervention, he insists that an individual must “not leave [a suicidal] person alone.” The friend or counselor “may need to call 911 if this becomes an emergency situation” and “depend on the emergency medical intervention of the state.”<sup>44</sup>

Lambert suggests that counselors work to build trust with reticent clients by stepping forth first in trust by disclosing some kind of personal interest in their case.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, counselors may know that it’s time for formal counseling to be concluded when the counseling agenda has been successfully completed or when a counselee establishes a pattern of failing to complete their homework.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Heath Lambert, “Sarah and Postpartum Depression,” *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture*, ed. Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 97.

<sup>43</sup> Lambert, “Sarah and Postpartum Depression,” 97.

<sup>44</sup> Heath Lambert, “Helping My Friend Who’s Suicidal,” Truth in Love Podcast 56 (published 4/5/17; accessed 3/14/23). <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-056-helping-my-friend-whos-suicidal/>.

<sup>45</sup> Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, “Answers to Your Counseling Questions,” Truth in Love Podcast 145 (published 3/12/18; accessed 11/1/22). Specifically Lambert says, “When I let you trust something of mine, then there is a growing chance that you’ll let me trust something of yours. I don’t mind with folks being very personal. I don’t mind telling them, ‘Let me tell you why what you came to talk to me about is so important to me.’ and then it could be that I’ve had something similar happen to me or maybe not something similar, but something terrible, and they’ll realize that, ‘Hey, I know what you’re talking about.’ Or I’ll tell them something personal in the sense that, ‘Hey, I’ve struggled with this sin too or I’ve struggled with a sin like it.’ I want to serve them by opening up my heart and showing them something of me and praying, hoping, trusting, and believing that when I do that to them, they’ll do it back and let me help.”

<sup>46</sup> Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, “Answers to Your Counseling Questions,” Truth in Love Podcast 144 (published 3/5/18; accessed 11/1/22). <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-144-answers-to-your-counseling-questions/>.

Stepping into a very different topic, Lambert comments on the relationship between people and animals:

There's not a thing in the whole world wrong with having an animal that you love. If you come home from a hard day of work, or if you're going through a hard time and there is an animal that, because of the connection that you have with that animal and the love that you feel for that animal, it gives you some comfort in a hard time, that is not controversial and that is not wrong at all.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, Lambert rejects the use of animals for therapy, arguing that doing so overturns the creation mandate, inflates pride, and can serve as substitutes for our need to rely on Jesus.

Lambert thus follows the pattern set forward by Adams and Mack—Lambert's practice of counseling is a mix of material drawn from Scripture and from domains outside of Scripture.

### A Question of Origin

The primary question that emerges from this survey is, "Where did the techniques and assertions employed by these biblical counselors come from?" Undoubtedly these authors will assert that all are applications of the biblical text, and therefore fall within their maximalist sufficiency position on Scripture and counseling. But at issue in this article is not the faithfulness or wisdom of their advice, but rather origin of that advice. Adams, Mack, and Lambert clearly source much of the content of their counseling from the Scriptures. However, other significant aspects of the system they endorse and many of the strategies they employ are nowhere to be found within the biblical text.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, "Emotional Support Animals," Truth in Love Podcast Episode 155 (published 5/21/18; accessed 3/14/23). <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-153-emotional-support-animals/>.

<sup>48</sup> There is some disagreement over exactly how independent Adams's nouthetic model is from secular approaches. His approach has been described as a nontechnical variant of cognitive-behavioral therapy from those outside the realm of biblical counseling. Even among biblical counselors, there is acknowledgement that O. Hobart Mowrer had a significant influence on Jay Adams's conception of what counseling ought to be, although the extent of that impact is up for debate. See George R. Ross, *Evaluating Models of Christian Counseling* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 89–91. Greg Gifford, "Jay Adams' Heritage: How Jay Adams Is Connected to the Father of American Psychology," Biblical Counseling Coalition (published 5/3/19; accessed 10/21/22). <https://www.biblicalcounseling-coalition.org/2019/05/03/jay-adams-heritage-how-jay-adams-is-connected-to-the-father-of-american-psychology/>.

### Where Did This Stuff Come From?

Two primary possibilities exist for where the extrabiblical material employed by these authors comes from. First, it is possible that their material comes from the domain of common grace, and, at times, the subcategory of secular psychology. Some biblical counselors frequently bemoan the reality that American culture is "psychologized." Yet, these authors too inhabit this psychologized environment. While biblical counselors have long guarded the front door from the intrusion of secular methods, methods found in secular counseling such as scaling, hour long appointments, and PDIs have slipped through the back door. It will not do to say that these are acceptable because they are consistent with biblical teaching, as the maximalist sufficiency position affirms that the Bible alone provides all necessary content for wise counseling. The very form of counseling adopted by these traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors mirrors not that of the biblical text, but rather the Western therapeutized culture it inhabits. It is difficult to understand why the superstructure of counseling may be sourced from secular psychology but specific, targeted practices may not.

Additionally, there are many different forms of "secular psychology." The information used by Adams, Mack, and Lambert tends to be more observational rather than clinical. But if observational data may be used, then empirically validated counseling strategies should be able to be used, as empirically validating them consists of observing how they effectively help human beings change. Those that are consistent with a biblical worldview should also be able to be employed, as secular-sourced interventions are not categorically against the grain of Scripture (see Mack's use of scaling and Lambert's use of creating an adverse environment). After all, once one has cracked the door open to using material from outside of Scripture, the question becomes not "Is this in the Bible?" but rather "Is this consistent with the Bible?" Once one is asking the second question, which must be asked by all biblical counselors, one is practicing integration.

A second possibility is that these techniques were generated from within the theorist themselves. Counselors tend to learn what works and what doesn't work through counseling, and any experienced counselor knows the feeling of having a fresh new approach or method suddenly emerge in their minds during a session. What's useful tends to be repeated, and what's not useful tends to be discarded. Yet even self-generated techniques are still a form of integration, as material is drawn from one's own reason and evaluations. The mind of the counselor is shaped by Scripture, but also broad cultural forces, education, ethnic experiences,

biological factors such as genetics, family history, and a whole host of other factors. The mind of a counselor is constantly integrating material from many domains and synthesizing it into a package that is hopefully both helpful to the counselee and in harmony with Scripture.

### **Conclusion: The Need for a Robust Theory of Integration**

This article has demonstrated that all biblical counselors use a system of counseling that combines material from the Scriptures and other domains of knowledge. This has been accomplished through evaluating the writings of traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors who have most strongly affirmed a maximalist view of sufficiency. Our evaluation has demonstrated that even these authors routinely use material from outside of Scripture, whether sourced from their own experience, the psychologically informed culture they inhabit, or direct learning.

Without a theologically robust theory of integration, biblical counseling is particularly susceptible to being swayed by the idiosyncratic evaluations of its leaders. Why is it that the hour-long meeting format, governed by forms and homework, is acceptable but drawing from empirically validated treatments such as systematic desensitization tends to be seen as unacceptable? Both can be seen as an application of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15 for homework, 1 Cor 9:27 for desensitization). In truth, no counselor can consistently hold that the Bible contains all information necessary for counseling because counseling is an inherently anthropocentric discipline. Its focus on human transformation traffics in everything that involves being human, topics that exceed the specific teachings of Scripture. While Scripture helps us evaluate all things, it does not explicitly teach us all things necessary to offer the best form of care for our counsees. A theologically robust theory of integration will go far towards establishing a solid substrate for engagement with material derived from common grace sources, material God has given to us in his goodness for our betterment.