

SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As It Is and As It Could Be

This essay is an informal conversation among the counseling faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). The tone of the conversation is casual, but the content seeks to accomplish two things: (1) address some of the leading questions currently being debated in evangelical counseling circles, and (2) provide the reader with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the unique flavor of SEBTS's counseling programs.

Sam Williams serves as the emcee for this conversation. Kristin Kellen, Nate Brooks, and Brad Hambrick dialogue with one another around his questions. We hope you enjoy eavesdropping as we explore leading questions in the field of evangelical counseling together and gain an appreciation for why we enjoy serving together in the counseling program at SEBTS.

Sam Williams: *In a kind and perfect world, how would you briefly label and define the truest, most loving, and effective approach to counseling?*

Nate Brooks: You certainly start off with a softball question there, Sam. I think that counseling that's true, effective, and loving will always be counseling that's consistent with God's heart and God's revelation to his creatures. That approach to counseling will have special revelation, general revelation, and common grace woven together throughout, as that is how God has shown himself to us for our flourishing. This kind of counseling will engage the fullness of what it means to be human—we are covenantal, relational creatures with rational, affective, and volitional powers, ruined by the fall, and restored through redemption.

I go back and forth about what to label such an approach. It is biblical counseling to be certain, as it is an approach that emerges out of the Scriptures. But there are approaches to counseling labeled “biblical counseling” that I would understand as falling far short of this ideal. It's also not Integrationism, as special revelation is not just the foundation of counseling but woven all throughout the DNA of everything done in counseling. I've found myself referring to this approach as “redemptive counseling,” as we seek to be part of God's work as he redeems us and his creation, making all things new.

Kristin Kellen: I'd agree with Nate. The Lord has created us to function within our creation in a particular way such that we would flourish,

and when we do so, that's what happens: we flourish. That necessarily entails the way we view people (our anthropology), how we understand the nature of truth and reality (our epistemology), or our actual methods, and each of these must be grounded in revealed knowledge from our Creator. Critical information is more clearly or explicitly given in the Word, other information can be gleaned from creation, but both contribute to how we care for others well.

I like the label “redemptive counseling,” though my heart still wants to hold on to the “biblical counseling” label. And yet, as Nate alludes to, the definition of that term can vary significantly from one counselor to another. Whatever we call it, it's the definition that matters the most: true, loving, and effective counseling is derived from our Creator's revealed truth, his methods, and his end goals.

Brad Hambrick: I'll expand on what Nate and Kristin have said by speaking of how I view my role as the counselor. When I first began counseling, I viewed my role as a counselor primarily through the lens of “teacher.” I thought that being a *biblical* counselor meant providing people with a practical theology for understanding their life struggle; that is, that a good theology would necessarily produce functional living.

As I have grown in experience as a counselor, I've found the role of “teacher” too narrow for what is required of an effective counselor. A teacher-only view of counseling portrays the counselee as struggling because they have an information deficit, and that more or better information would resolve their struggle. It also conceives of God as only being concerned with what a counselee thinks, believes, or values.

This realization led me to view my role as counselor more through the lens of “ambassador.” I am in the counseling office to represent and embody God's primary concerns for this individual at this point in their life. That often involves teaching, but allows for more room for the relational benefits of counseling—listening, empathy, understanding, etc.

So, to tie these comments back into what Nate and Kristin have shared, when teaching is the mode of care that best represents God's primary concern for this person, I want to be a “biblical counselor.” When the relational influences of counseling best represent how God would care for this person, then “redemptive counselor” is a more comprehensive description of what I'm striving to be.

Sam Williams: *Let's go with the label “redemptive counseling.” What does or should distinguish redemptive counseling from other approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing*

(EMDR)? *What does a redemptive counselor bring to the table that is distinctive and unique?*

Kristin Kellen: For me, if I only had to pick one thing, it'd be the end goal. I wholeheartedly believe that we were created by God for the purpose of becoming more like Christ, for the glory of God, and for our enjoyment and flourishing (sorry, Westminster Catechism, I'm adding a step there). If we employ any of those approaches, some of which can be incredibly helpful, towards any other end, our counseling is insufficient. Ultimately, and I'll borrow a phrase I've heard you say, we're merely air conditioning their train ride to hell.

Now, I wouldn't say that means every session must be evangelistic or that we cannot do anything to alleviate suffering, even for an unbeliever. After all, as Mike Emlet has said, the relief of suffering is a kingdom agenda; it gives us a foretaste of the coming redemption. So, we can use secular methods, within a biblical framework and paired with biblical teaching, in such a way that they lead toward sanctification, and in doing so, they are oriented toward God's glory and the counselee's conformity to Christ. We are helping people move toward their God-given end, rather than simply seeking relief from pain or discomfort.

Nate Brooks: Every approach to counseling combines observation and worldview. We observe how people think, desire, and choose and then explain this by means of our beliefs or worldview. This means that every theoretical approach to counseling is (partially) based upon the observation of God's image bearers. It's really difficult to study God's images, breathe God's air, reason with the intellect God has given and get absolutely nothing right. I think this explains why some of these secular approaches to counseling are so helpful—due to God's common grace they do stumble into his truth, unwittingly. However, each of them is ultimately reductionistic. They're trying to reverse engineer the person without the instruction manual, and because of that they also get things terribly wrong at times.

Redemptive counseling is counseling with the instruction manual in hand. This helps us understand where some of the approaches may be helpful and where they're a dead end. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), for instance, gets right that beliefs and thinking are so important. However, Jas 4:17 insists that we can know what's right and choose not to do it. We can't put all our chips in on cognition, as our affections and the orientation of our hearts often direct our thoughts. At our core we aren't reasonable—otherwise we wouldn't have listened to a snake instead of Yahweh. The same can be said for every approach to counseling. CBT can teach us much about how to practically engage in thought change and

what kinds of practices help new thoughts stick. But acknowledging this is different than accepting the entire anthropology espoused by CBT. This willingness to learn skills, but not accept whole systems, distinguishes redemptive counseling from both traditional Integrationism and traditional biblical counseling.

At its best, redemptive counseling engages us fully as human beings—body and soul, with all the complexity of our individual psychological makeup. That's a tall order, to be certain, but you asked for the ideal world, Sam!

Brad Hambrick: I'll approach your question by exploring the relationship between healthiness and holiness. Modalities of counseling that neglect redemption in Christ focus exclusively on helping the counselee become *healthier*; that is, to reduce emotional distress and improve relationships. We can call that approach to counseling "good but incomplete."

A redemptive counselor is going to help a counselee reinforce their pursuit of healthiness with a pursuit of holiness, which is only available to us in relationship to God. When counseling is focused on an area of suffering this would entail helping the counselee understand God's compassion. More than mere relief, the counselor wants the counselee to understand God, like a good father, wants this relief for them. The counseling techniques utilized represent God's heart towards their suffering.

When counseling focuses on an area of sin, this would entail helping the counselee appreciate God's moral laws as good and embracing the freedom that comes through repentance and forgiveness. Repentance is not God shaming them for their sin, but a gift of freedom and means to restore relationships.

The redemptive counselor should be no less skilled than the non-redemptive counselor. But redemptive counselors should be more overt in their efforts to strengthen a counselee's trust and faith in God's character as they pursue a healthier life. When this is done well, the counselee's Christian faith is deepened, and the resources of the counselee's faith enhances the depth of change experienced in counseling.

Sam Williams: *Nate Brooks's article in this journal is entitled, "Everybody Integrates" in which he contends that integration is practically inevitable, even for the most "biblical" of counselors. In addition, several of us have contended that common grace and special revelation are not competitive but are intended by God to be complementary. And yet, the atheistic worldview and presuppositions of most contemporary psychologists are no secret. Their theories about human functioning and their methods for how to help people change operate as if counseling or psychotherapy is a God-free zone. Because of this, the first generation of biblical counselors (exemplified, certainly not exclusively but*

perhaps most boldly, by Jay Adams in much of his writing) stridently rejected “integrationism.” Were they mostly right or mostly wrong in doing so? How should we understand this dilemma?

Brad Hambrick: If we name the experience of trust as an increase in the neurotransmitter oxytocin, are we mostly right or mostly wrong? The answer is, we’re completely and incompletely accurate. What we’ve said is *completely accurate*. Oxytocin is the neurotransmitter most closely associated with the experience of trust. But no one would watch the bond emerging as a mother tenderly rocks her child to sleep and say that moment can be completely explained by neurochemistry. So, to reduce trust to a neurotransmitter is *incompletely accurate*.

Let’s use this example of being simultaneously completely and incompletely accurate as a parallel for the Nouthetic critique of including common grace resources for counseling, particularly those from the empirical vein of modern counseling approaches. I would contend that Jay Adams, and current Nouthetic counselors who take his logic further than he did, are completely and incompletely accurate. They are *completely accurate* to say that modern theories and practices of counseling omit God from their view of people, problems, and remedies. They are *completely accurate* to note that this is a problem that should be a primary concern of Christians seeking counseling and those providing counsel.

However, let’s consider how this approach is *incompletely accurate*. Someone who reads even in the introductory pages of *Competent to Counsel*—Jay Adams’s first book on counseling—realizes Jay Adams was grateful to have learned from O. Hobart Mowrer, a secular psychologist with a very critical and oppositional view of Christianity. Despite this, Adams’s introduction to *Competent to Counsel* acknowledges a debt of gratitude for Mowrer’s clearly influential role in the development of Nouthetic Counseling:

I read some of Mowrer’s works, including *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, and *The New Group Therapy*, which he had just published. These books astounded me. Mowrer had gone far beyond my own thinking.... Reading Mowrer’s book, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, as I said, was an earth-shattering experience.... I came home deeply indebted to Mowrer for indirectly driving me to a conclusion that I as a Christian minister should have known all along, namely, that many of the ‘mentally ill’ are people who can be helped by the ministry of God’s Word.¹

That might merely mean that Jay Adams was right in his assessment

¹ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), xiv–xviii.

of resources like Mowrer’s work, but inconsistent in his willingness to practice it. After all, we’ve all been inconsistent with our ideals. But I believe it is more than that. Jay Adams recognized that a secular psychologist (even one who believed Christianity contributed more to mental illness than it cured) could make accurate and useful observations about people, culture, and paths towards healthiness. Jay Adams was willing to learn from, even study under Mowrer for an extended time, to benefit from his work to such a degree that it merited acknowledgement in his seminal book. Jay Adams was able to “eat the fish” (take what was useful) and “spit out the bones” (reject what contradicted Scripture), which is what faithful Christians do when engaging any field of study, including psychology. Jay Adams redeemed what he learned from Mowrer, and *Competent to Counsel* was a fruit of that lesson.²

This leads to the following question, “Why do some biblical counselors trust Jay Adams to do this type of integration, but not trust others who claim to do the same thing?” A question this broad has many answers. I’ll explore only one. The trust exists because of the person. In the same way that we might trust Miles Davis or John Coltrane to “play jazz” and riff on a melody, but not Justin Bieber.

The reality is integration is an activity like jazz more than it is like mathematics. Every mathematician, if they are good at their craft, will come up with the same answer when they input the same data into the same formula. This is true whether they work the formula in private or public, in France or Taiwan, or while teaching a prideful student or a timid one. But this is not how integration works.

Integration is more like jazz than sheet music. Jay Adams could hear the “melody” played by Mowrer, repurpose it for a redemptive agenda, and ministered it as a “new song” that sought to promote both healthiness and holiness. Jay Adams did this and the end product was biblically faithful. That is why those who say Adams didn’t play the same “song” as Mowrer are *completely accurate*, but to say that Adams did not integrate is *incompletely accurate*.

Like all of us, Jay Adams learned from his context. Like the wise, he sought guidance from those who had extensive experience where he lacked it. He then repurposed what he learned for his context. In that

² For a more in-depth assessment of Mowrer’s influence on Adams and its implications for the modern biblical counseling movement, see Bob Kelleman’s article “Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement: O. Hobart Mowrer” available at <https://rpmministries.org/2023/10/o-hobart-mowrer-the-man-who-influenced-the-early-nouthetic-counseling-movement>.

sense, if we work redemptively with what we learn from the social sciences, we are following the example of Jay Adams even though his later writings and those who follow in his footsteps criticize this integrative work. Nonetheless, we integrate for three reasons:

1. *It is wise:* We should seek to learn from those who excel in their work, even when we disagree with their presuppositions and need to redemptively recontextualize their work.
2. *It is good stewardship of common grace:* God grants wisdom and insight to the just and unjust, the redeemed and unredeemed; therefore, we should be willing to learn from both.
3. *It is inevitable:* We are strongly influenced, for better and worse, by the sources of knowledge around us; therefore, it is better to be intentional about filtering those influences than pretending we are impenetrable.

Nate Brooks: I'm not sure that anything really needs to be added to Brad's answer. It's a good and well-thought one. Maybe I can round it out by exploring another angle.

There's a difference between integration as a noun and as a verb. The verb is an activity, a process. And it's absolutely unavoidable for every Christian, as it's part of how God designed us to operate in the world. This type of integration is taking material from different domains and integrating them together into a coherent, workable whole. Preachers do this when they organize their sermons into points, integrating research in rhetoric and memory with the life-giving Word of God to produce a better sermon. A parent integrates as they combine material from economics, nutrition, and time management to organize meal preparation for the family. Counselors likewise are consistently drawing material from various domains as we seek to care well for the persons we counsel.

This verb form should not be confused with the noun form of the word, which usually gets rendered as "Integrationism." This term refers to a particular school of thought within the discussion of how to do counseling as a Christian, especially regarding the way psychology and theology are understood to relate to one another.

Returning to Brad's answer (and my essay), even the staunchest Nouthetic counselor is persistently integrating. Adams in particular used all kinds of material outside Scripture to develop biblical counseling. Thus, he is integrating (process, verb), but he's not an Integrationist (school of thought, noun). This point becomes particularly critical as later counselors within the Nouthetic tradition will strongly insist that the incorporation of extra-biblical material in counseling is either unnecessary

or unfaithful. Yet, you can't actually *do* counseling without incorporating extra-biblical material in counseling. Even the meta-structure of counseling—an individual you talk with about a particular problem, typically for an hour, etc.—which is present in Nouthetic counseling has no specific biblical precedent to point to. That pattern is derived from contemporary secular counseling. Even though the primary location may shift from the counselor's office to the church, this spatiotemporal structure is not derived from Scripture.

Within biblical counseling, we've historically operated out of a rather idiosyncratic approach to integration. As Brad has said, the fact is that certain individuals function as "gatekeepers" for what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable integration. The truth of the matter is that many practices in biblical counseling can be found in secular theories as well. Biblical counseling and CBT both work to identify errant beliefs and replace them with new ones. Narrative therapy works to help individuals by changing the story they tell themselves about who they are and their life events, as biblical counseling seeks to help people connect their stories with the grand metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Homework assignments such as self-reflection, journaling, and bibliotherapy are common throughout secular approaches to psychology as well. Why would we not learn from other schools of thought in the same way that Adams learned from Mowrer?

Kristin Kellen: As Nate said, there's not a whole lot to add here (even less so after both!). I'll add a thought briefly, though, and that is the *necessity* of understanding common grace truths/realities in order to properly understand special revelation truth. Common grace gives richness, clarity, and dimension to what God has revealed in his word. This is not to say that Scripture is insufficient, only that God intended us to have "both books." To ignore one or the other diminishes our understanding of the one remaining.

Let's apply this understanding to the use of secular counseling. Are common grace observations, sometimes articulated in terms of "scientific observations," necessary to understand people and their problems, to which we then apply Scripture? I'd argue "yes," though we must be clear in what we mean by "scientific observations." We all do scientific (i.e., systematic) inquiry in our minds: we observe, categorize, make sense of, and then act in light of what we see and how we think about it. And we're just one person. We cannot separate our understanding of reality from how we respond to that reality. Thus, any "science" used must correspond to reality, to God's reality. Some may argue that it's a leap to then say we need secular psychological science, but as Nate has demonstrated in his article, it's almost foolish to think that we don't already use psychological

science by default. Let's just call it what it is. We can do so while still acknowledging its limitations and asserting the wisdom needed to engage with it.

Perhaps an example would make clear what I'm talking about here. When someone experiences extreme fear and has a physiological response to it (what psychologists call "fight or flight"), we almost instinctively act and speak calmly and help them physically calm down. We give them space for their bodies to return to a normal state. Many years ago, when I was being trained in biblical counseling, we didn't use words like "grounding techniques" or "deep breathing," as secular psychology would now label it. However, I've found it incredibly helpful to follow the "instructions" gleaned from observations and science to help my counselees calm their bodies. I'm not sure it ultimately matters what we call it, but gleaned information from scientific observation can be incredibly helpful.

One last thought: If we already do integration by default, then there's an imperative to do it well, not haphazardly. In our care and love for our neighbor, it is an ethical imperative to care for them with excellence. We must be cognizant of the process that we are *already engaging in*. We must integrate well. To do it well, we must consider how we are integrating, what we are integrating, and toward what end.

Sam Williams: *Adolescent mental health has deteriorated rapidly over the last 12 years, deaths of despair in men (drug overdoses and suicides) skyrocketed over the last decade, and anxiety and/or depression affect 25–35 percent of women during their lifetime. Undeniably, our minds are broken, and we live in a very broken world. What is or should be the role of the Christian church in addressing these matters?*

Kristin Kellen: I counsel a lot of young people, so this question resonates with me. Most counselors at the beginning of COVID could tell you that we'd be here today, and that was even without knowing how long it would take to get through it. Those two years only served to exacerbate what was already a reality.

Now to answer your question: ideally, the church should be the *primary* place of counseling, insofar as they are able to serve adequately and competently. Christians were given numerous "one another" commands under which much of counseling falls. Sometimes, though, others outside of the church are necessary to provide the best care. This isn't a judgment statement; churches are limited and may not have someone within the congregation who can provide adequate care for the members.

For the church to be the primary source of counseling requires attention be given to identifying and training leaders to provide this counseling, and correlative systems and resources must be developed within the

church. And yet, some churches on their own may not be able to care for their people sufficiently, which is where cooperation comes in. We can utilize resources from within the larger body to care for those who need it. Then, if needs still remain, or deeper expertise is required, then we can refer to a believer who has been trained to do clinical care.

Brad Hambrick: Kristin did an excellent job of describing the impact of isolation that has occurred during and after COVID. That impact is real. Major events like COVID usually do not *create* new cultural trends. Instead, they tend to *accelerate* existing trends. I believe that is true in this case.

For well over a decade, relationships in our culture have become more superficial. The average American moves eleven times in their lifetime.³ That is eleven times when that individual has to start over at cultivating a meaningful community. That doesn't include major transitions like changing schools or changing jobs in the same city.

Add to this the "polish" we are perpetually tempted to put on our lives via social media, and the number of important subjects that are so polarized it feels unsafe to ask honest questions about them, and you have a powerful recipe for isolation, or at least, highly superficial socialization.

Hearing this, Gen 2:18 should be ringing in our mind, "It is not good that the man should be alone." If this is true before the Genesis 3 fall, how much more true is it when sin has permeated our hearts and suffering infected our world. Being alone—unknown and without connection to other people—magnifies every other struggle in our life, not least of all mental health struggles.

In light of this, we realize how vital the church is, or could be. The church is meant to be a place of deep and redemptive connection (Acts 2:42–27; 4:32–37), where it should be common to be honest about our sin (1 Tim 1:15–17; Jas 5:16) and our suffering (2 Cor 1:8–11).

With this in mind, I think a big part of the answer to Sam's question occurs not when we're seated in rows listening to a pastor preach (as important as that is), but when we're sitting in circles deciding how honest, vulnerable, and transparent we will be with one another. This is enough of a burden for me that my next book, *Transformative Friendships: Seven Questions to Deepen Any Relationship* (New Growth Press, coming April 2024), is devoted to helping churches cultivate these kinds of relationships in their congregations.

The greatest untapped resource for sanctification and mental health

³ "Calculating Migration Expectancy Using ACS Data," United States Census Bureau, updated December 3, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/migration/guidance/calculating-migration-expectancy.html>.

may be simple honesty and authenticity. Honesty is the difference between being alone with our challenges and having the support God wants all of us to have through the church. When we fail to be authentic, we unplug ourselves from the care God intends for us to have and the hopelessness that undergirds the statistics that Sam referenced begins to feel suffocating.

Nate Brooks: The church is in a unique place to address this mental health breakdown because it is the custodian of humanity's hope. Brad and Kristin have helpfully laid out many of the troubles that result in statistics like those you've cited, Sam. It really isn't all that surprising we are where we are, given these factors. The major question is what we do about it. People aren't likely to move fewer times and we can't count on cultural fractures being stitched back together. Where's hope in the midst of this?

We are lost, cast about, without hope. God isn't caught off guard by these realities. In fact, it's the natural result of the curse being woven throughout the fabric of human existence after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. While God isn't caught off guard, I think we often can be, and especially so for those who do not know God and his description of ourselves and our world. As Christians, ultimately, we find hope in the message of the gospel. The church is the proclaimer of this gospel that faces human despair head-on.

I don't mean to be reductionistic, but the cornerstone of hope is the present faithfulness of God in the midst of whatever awful circumstances befall us. My favorite passage in Scripture is a ray of hope in the middle of some of the darkest Scripture written. Having just witnessed the manifold atrocities of a conquering, pillaging army intent on destroying the Jewish people, the author of Lamentations reminds us that:

Because of the Lord's faithful love
we do not perish,
for his mercies never end.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness!
I say, "The Lord is my portion,
therefore I will put my hope in him."

The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the person who seeks him.
It is good to wait quietly
for salvation from the Lord. (Lam 3:22–26 CSB)

Through its ministry of preaching, evangelism, discipleship, feeding the needy, caring for single mothers, etc. the church offers this hope-full

message to those who are feeling the dark effects of being adrift. How this is played out in the real ministries of the church is certainly more complex. But in the midst of conversations about the church and its care in the realm of mental health, let's not skip the foundation. We do have hope to offer, and that's really hard to come by in this world.

Sam Williams: *To bring our conversation to a conclusion, imagine that you woke up this morning and miraculously the greatest problems and needs in Christian counseling were resolved. What would be different? So that we're not just dreaming, what next step(s) would need to be taken for this ideal world to become more of a reality?*

Brad Hambrick: As I think about this question, two passages come to mind. The first is 1 Tim 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." In context, Paul is talking about our finances and temptation toward greed. But I believe the passage applies well to any situation where comparative thinking tempts us towards pride.

Pride is very competitive. Too much of the conversation in the Christian and biblical counseling worlds is about who does counseling better. I think the evangelical counseling world will be better when we all are content to be excellent in our role. Whether we are licensed, or ministry based, in a parachurch or local church setting, let's focus on being an excellent ambassador of Christ in that setting.

The second passage is 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul is mediating the debate about whether believers should eat food sacrificed to idols. In their day, this was no small question, although it may seem that way to us. If you read the passage, you'll find that Paul had a clear conviction on the matter. But this conviction did not usurp his desire for other-minded unity among believers.

Our inability to hold strong views that vary from one another on matters we deem important is tearing our world apart. It makes social media toxic. In an ideal world, those who lead the Christian and biblical counseling movements—where navigating conflict is common—would model for the church how this is done well.

In order for the ideals of these two passages to become a reality, I believe one step would be foundational: namely, listening with charity. We know we are listening with charity when we interpret what the other says with integrity (i.e., not reading the worst possible meaning into their words). We know we are listening with charity when we value the work of another even when it's in a different setting than our own. This is not easy or natural for us as fallen, sinful people. But we can pray that by God's grace it becomes an increasing feature of debates in the evangelical counseling community and, thereby, begins to permeate the church-at-large.

Nate Brooks: The modern biblical counseling movement has been around for over 50 years in America. It's gone from being a fringe view in the world of Christian counseling to multiple seminaries offering PhDs in the subject specifically. There's been a shift where, to a significant extent, Christ has been restored to counseling and counseling to the local church. Certainly, there is need for more growth, but the biblical counseling movement has largely been successful in its aims. But now what?

John Frame wrote a helpful article some years back titled "Machen's Warrior Children" in which he documents the creation of the new Presbyterian Church in America denomination in the face of growing theological liberalism. Frame's contention is that the combative origin story of the PCA became a persistent mood wherein the participants battled with each other over increasingly more minor points of doctrine, even though the major conflict had come to a close. Frame's words are prescient for the biblical counseling movement. Galatians 5:15 warns believers that "If you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another" (CSB).

I'm a seminary professor, and a large amount of my time is spent reading. One thing I've always appreciated about many other disciplines is their ability to have discussions about ideas without turning those discussions into a disputation of someone's character. The conflict over narrower points of doctrine doesn't devolve into questions about someone's salvation. There's an emphasis upon accurately quoting others and engaging at the level of thoughts and ideas. Minor points of difference aren't treated as a point of dire peril for the church at large.

I would love to see biblical counseling mature this way, away from the faithful/unfaithful binary that sows suspicion, promotes tribalism, and leads to unnecessary conflict. Doing this requires careful scholarship and stepping away from fear. Not everyone will agree with one another and that's okay. I'm sure if you pressed the four of us in this discussion, you'd find ways that we view things differently. But I know the hearts and the practices of my colleagues here and their ability to offer good, redemptive-centered care is not a question. An ethos of epistemic humility forces us to recognize our own limitations, to acknowledge the fact that we could be in error, and to trust the Spirit's work in someone else's life. My lane doesn't have to overlap entirely with someone else's lane in order for them to be part of God's good work in someone's life. I'm grateful for those who embody this spirit within biblical counseling and pray that it continues to grow.

Kristin Kellen: Rather than reiterate what I'd give a hearty "amen!" to above, let me offer an additional gap that needs to be addressed: the lack of resources. Almost weekly, I get a question along the lines of "Do

you know of any good resources for XYZ from a Christian perspective?" Sometimes, there's an easy answer, a clear and obvious (sufficient, or at least thorough) resource to share. But more often than not, I have to write back something like "Well, that's a great question... there's a *minibook* or an *article* on that, but we really need more." We have done a great job articulating (and debating) the underlying theory or approach to biblical counseling, even though we haven't reached a consensus, hence the two answers above. But I think the most acute gap is a lack of written resources on specific topics that people are struggling with.

Let me give an example: In the last few months alone, I've received emails or had conversations with ladies in churches or students asking about resources for ADHD, defiant children (oppositional defiant disorder), infertility, and eating disorders. I can think of one, maybe two, resources for the four of these topics combined. These disorders are fairly commonplace, including within the church, and yet we either have no resources at all or those that are somewhat outdated.

To answer the question you asked, if I were to wake up in the morning and our greatest problem was miraculously solved, I'd walk into my office and find a bookshelf full of resources on every specific counseling topic imaginable, from a distinctly Christian perspective. I'd see a handful of books on self-harm, addiction (substances and behavior), eating disorders, particular kinds of trauma, and a host of others. But right now, we have very little *specifics*. The next step, then, is for people to get trained, practice counseling, and share the wisdom God has given them through writing *deeply* about particular struggles in the Christian life, not from an existential or conceptual perspective, but from a practical, "here's how you walk with someone with X" perspective. *That* would advance Christian counseling and serve the kingdom.