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**Discussing a Dozen Dreams (Part IV of V):
Biblical Counseling Will Be Holistic in Theory, Methodology, & Equipping**

An Extended Conversation with Robert W. Kellemen, Ph.D.

By Bradley Charles Hambrick

Filling in the Map

**Dream Number Eight:
Biblical Counseling Will Be Holistic In Theory**

Biblical Counseling will focus on the full range of human nature created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). A holistic Biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* includes seeing human beings as relational beings who desire (our spiritual, social, and self-awareness capacities), rational beings who think, volitional beings who choose, emotional beings who experience, and physical beings who act. Biblical Counseling models of change will focus on each of these areas, seeing the human personality as holistically united.

It will not deny the interplay or the complexity of our mind/brain and body/soul connection. Such Biblical Counseling will take seriously the role of the brain (in a fallen world in an unglorified body) and its impact on healthy human functioning.

BCH: As you dream about Biblical Counseling being holistic in theory (dream number eight), that would seem to imply that there are under-developed areas. Unless we want to assume that our theological and methodological approaches have fully mined the depth of God's Word, I think that is a safe assumption. Outside of the mind/body relationship which you mention, what other areas do you see as needing more attention and theological reflection within Biblical Counseling? Another way to phrase the same question, if you write the titles of the next ten journal articles you would be thrilled to read what would they be?

RWK: And how much would I be paid for organizing those next ten journal articles? Seriously, dream eight provides something of an outline of areas that I believe any legitimate Biblical model of counseling must address relative to the nature of human nature. We need to explore the Bible's **comprehensive** teaching on our nature as relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings.

Of late, there has been more work done on the *relational/spiritual* aspect in Biblical Counseling. I believe this is long overdue. The great Reformed and Puritan writers spoke much about our "religious affections" (see Jonathan Edwards as one example), yet for years Biblical counselors tended to neglect our God-created desires and longings. This connects to our need for a Biblical Creation/Fall/Redemption model.



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Too often we see “desires” only through the lens of fallen, lustful, sinful desires. The second authors speak of “longings,” for instance; they are accused of being “secular” and of teaching “need” theology.

When I speak of spiritual longings, desires, and affections, I am talking about the Biblical truth that the “holy of holies” of our soul is the God-shaped thirst for the Trinity. Of course, in our fallenness it has been distorted, twisted, and depraved into idols of the heart. However, it has never been eliminated, and in our redemption, our thirsts have been redirected back to God. Good Biblical Counseling will always highlight our spiritual affections as a core aspect of counseling.

Biblical Counseling also needs to continue to develop a theology of our “social” nature. God told us that it is not good for man to be alone. Sometimes in our desire to highlight our spiritual relationship to God, we minimize, in ways the Bible never does, our social relationships to one another. We need more Biblical Counseling books and articles on marriage, dating, business relationships, spiritual friendships, one anothering, pure relationships among adult singles, parent/child relationships, etc.

We are also “*self-aware beings*.” That is, we alone among all of God’s creatures have the ability to reflect on ourselves, others, life, purpose, and meaning. No where in the world is there a doggie Association of Biblical Counselors! Some of us misinterpret Romans 12:3 to mean that we should never even think about ourselves. The verse actually says that we should never think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but according to the measure of faith. I take that to mean that instead of talking about self-esteem and self-image, which are thoroughly secular concepts, we need to develop Biblical models of Christ-esteem and Christ-image. Practically then, we need to help our counsees to explore questions such: “Who am I *in* Christ?” “Who am I *to* Christ?” “Based upon who I am in and to Christ, how should I love God and others?” “What story or narrative of life is God wanting my life to write since I am an ‘epistle’ representing the living Word on earth?”

In Psalm 42, David provides a great, practical example of how to operate as self-aware beings. “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:5). Martin Lloyd Jones in his classic work on *Spiritual Depression*, first introduced me to the fact that David reflects on himself, talks to himself, and talks himself out of hopelessness by reflecting on God. He is aware of his own inner battle, and wins the battle both by accurate self-reflection and precise God-reflection.

Biblical Counseling also is doing a better job, I believe, in thinking about *thinking*—our *rational capacities*. We can’t simply exhort people to change behavior without helping people to renew their minds. As I’ve studied the Bible’s teaching on our rational nature, I have seen that we think in ideas and images. By “images” I mean the Hebrew word *yaser* which contains the concept that we think in pictures, themes, narratives, stories, parables, and images. Isaiah 26:3 tells us that God will keep us in perfect peace whose *yaser* is focused on God. Good Biblical counseling will explore the counselee’s image of God, image of self, image of life—exposing where they are sinful, and helping the counselee to put off sinful images and put on godly images. (For more on this concept, see *Soul Physicians: A Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, 179-189).

Biblical Counseling has done a good job with our *volitional nature*, especially with the concept of actions/behaviors. Additionally, the Bible speaks of our volitionality in terms of our *will*. And our will also



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has to do with *motives*. Thus, we need to explore with counselees not only what they do, but *why* they do what they do. I often say in *Soul Physicians*, “we pursue (volitional motivation) what we perceive (rational direction) to be pleasing (relational affections).” That’s part of the “holistic theory” of human personality structure that dream eight addresses.

The second and third generation Biblical counselors are also doing a better job addressing our *emotionality*. I think emotions have become the “black sheep” of the image bearing family. We act as if emotions are only a result of our fallenness. But God designed us with us emotions because He designed us in His image and God is an emotional Being.

It is sad to me that as Christians we tend to jump on the bandwagon about a decade or more after the world finds a “hot topic.” In the 1990s, Daniel Goleman wrote numerous best-sellers about “emotional intelligence.” However, his entire model is based upon an evolutionary matrix. Why do we wait until *after* his writings to realize that we need a Biblical theology of emotions? The Psalms, for example, especially the lament psalms, provide us with immense direction in understanding how to express our emotionality, how to manage our moods, and how to soothe our soul in our Savior.

We also need to do more work on our *physical nature*. We don’t want to end up being Neo-Platonic in our theory-building and assuming that the body is either evil or inconsequential. We need to ponder the mind-body connection and address the depth of interrelationship. I was forced to explore this in more detail three years ago when I was assigned a paper at the Evangelical Theological Society on “Neuroscience and the Soul.” (The paper is available as a free download to your readers at http://www.rpmbooks.org/free_resources.html).

So let’s see, those ten titles you asked about. . . how about: 1.) A Biblical Theology of Relational/Spiritual Beings, 2.) A Biblical Theology of Relational/Social Beings, 3.) A Biblical Theology of Relational/Self-Aware Beings, 4.) A Biblical Theology of Rational Beings Thinking in Ideas, 5.) A Biblical Theology of Rational Beings Thinking in Images, 6.) A Biblical Theology of Volitional Motivation, 7.) A Biblical Theology of Volitional Action, 8.) A Biblical Theology of Emotional Reaction, 9.) A Biblical Theology of the Brain/Body Connection, 10.) A Holistic Model of the Nature of Human Nature.

BCH: I appreciate you honoring my shameless request to outline the next several editions of the journal. Honestly, I am committed to asking this question in all of the conversation pieces we release in the journal. I believe it is part of the mission of *The Journal of Counseling & Discipleship* to discover what individuals (inside and outside of Biblical Counseling) see as the under-developed aspects of Biblical Counseling theory and practice. Your walk through the aspects of human nature and subsequent questions is a valuable contribution to this endeavor. Thank you.

In the midst of that discussion, you reference the “need-based” models of counseling and caution Biblical Counseling against losing a theology of our God-given longings. In much of the popular Christian counseling literature, “need” language and need-theory are (in my opinion) often used to incorporate secular ideas in very sympathetic, compassionate, and convincing language/stories. In your opinion, what is a good litmus test for whether the word “need” is being used to incorporate secular ideas or whether it is being used as a synonym for God-given longing? In follow up to a previous conversation, would you



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recommend Biblical Counseling abandon the word “need” and coin our own language or seek to redefine its usage redemptively?

RWK: I’ll address your last question first. I think it is best that we abandon the language of “need.” I personally do not like or use the word “need” in conjunction with affections, longings, desires, and thirsts. As far as I have been able to determine, the Bible does not use “need” with these concepts. However, the Bible clearly emphasizes a host of words related to “longings.” I did my Th.M. thesis on this very topic. It has the “heady,” cumbersome title: *Hebrew Anthropological Terms as a Foundation for a Biblical Counseling Model of Humanity* (Grace Seminary, 1985). Among other terms, I examined the Old Testament word for “soul” (*nephesh* used 755 times) and found that soul is used with at least *fourteen* different terms for longing.

As I indicated in my initial response, we “get in trouble” when we fail to examine a Creation/Fall/Redemption theology of the soul’s desires. Created to long for God—to love Him with all our soul, heart, mind, spirit, and strength—in our fallenness we now substitute any and everything for God. Jeremiah 2:13 says it succinctly. “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

This begins to address your first question concerning how to discern when “need theology” becomes the proverbial “Trojan Horse” sneaking secular theory into the church. Is the person using precise, accurate theology when speaking about “needs”? Is the person confusing our original God-designed state with the fallen state? How is the person defining “needs”? What literature does the person reference—secular thinking, historical theology, or Biblical theology? Frankly, most who use the language of “need,” in my opinion, are not talking about the same concept we are talking about concerning affections, longings, desires, thirst, and hunger. Another litmus test is, does the person talk about cisterns—false idols of the heart? Does the person understand and communicate the Bible’s teaching on what depravity has done to the direction of the soul’s affection?

On the other hand, as I indicated, I think in our fear of “need theology,” we have avoided the Biblical and historical theology of religious affections, spiritual longings, and social desires. In fact, at times we have even “demonized” them. Just as emotions are sometimes considered the “black sheep of the image bearing family,” so are desires. We need a *Redemption Theology of Thirst*. Thirst was God’s idea. God uses thirst to draw us to Himself. “As the deer pants for streams of living water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1-2). Augustine, Martin Luther, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Boston, Jonathan Edwards, and so many others all saw that a core aspect of pastoral ministry is calling and drawing redeemed people to closeness with God as the most satisfying, beautiful, fulfilling, lovely, holy, perfect Being in the universe. Just as I would have concern about those who use “need theology,” I have equal concern about those who neglect a redeemed theology of religious affections, spiritual longings, and social desires.



Imbalance, Counter-balance, Balance

**Dream Number Nine:
Biblical Counseling Will Be Holistic In Methodology**

In Christian counseling today, there seems to be a great divide between models that focus on suffering and those that focus on sinning. Biblical Counseling will treat both suffering and sin by recognizing that God's Word is profitable for dealing with the evils we have suffered (soul care), as well as with the sins we have committed (spiritual direction). True Biblical Counseling offers comfort for the hurting as well as confrontation for the hardened. It provides sustaining and healing for those battered by life, as well as reconciling and guiding for those ensnared by Satan.

Sustaining and healing (soul care for suffering) are classic terms in the history of Christian pastoral care.⁴ Through sustaining and healing, Biblical counselors will offer *parakaletic* care (called alongside to comfort—like the Holy Spirit our Divine Comforter, John 14:15-31; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11).⁵

Reconciling and guiding (spiritual direction for sin and sanctification) are equally historic terms.⁶ Through reconciling and guiding, God will use Biblical counselors to empower repentant and forgiven believers to apply principles of growth in grace.

BCH: Your dream for Biblical Counseling to be more complete in methodology (dream number nine) seems to imply that Biblical Counseling has focused more attention upon eradicating sin and moral evil than persevering through suffering and situational evil. As one who studies counseling not only as a practitioner and educator, but also as a historian, to what would you attribute this current swing on the pendulum of attention? What should be done to address this without creating a counter-imbalance for the next generation of Biblical counselors? From your reading (modern and historic authors) can you provide our readers with books you believe deal with particular subjects with this methodological balance between sin and suffering?

RWK: I think there are historical and theological reasons why modern Biblical Counseling was launched with a focus on sin. Even secular psychiatrist Karl Menninger asked the question, "Whatever happened to sin?" Since Evangelical pastoral care, by and large from 1860 to 1960 lost sight of sin, the pendulum needed to be pulled back. The subtitle of E. Brook Holifield's book *A History of Pastoral Care in America* says it all: *From Salvation to Self-Realization*. The "problem" became "how to help people to be "actualized." Of course, we know that our core problem is sin and thus how to be reconciled to the holy God of the universe. Thus, I don't fault Biblical Counseling one iota for returning us to a focus upon sin.

But sin is not only personal sin—the sin's I commit and my own inborn sinfulness that pervades every aspect of my being. Sin includes living in a fallen world and having that fallen world fall on us. That means



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that people sin against us—they abuse us. That means that the impact of sin affects us—we get cancer, our loved one dies of a heart attack, we suffer.

Historically, the Church did deal both with *the sins we commit and the evils we suffer*. Personally, having pastored three churches, I know that my people came to me not only with issues of personal sin that needed to be exposed and that they needed to find victory over, but also with horrible suffering for which they were not directly, personally responsible. Lest I become like Job's miserable counselors, I needed to be sure that I could distinguish between causes, that I could distinguish between personal sin issues and issues of suffering at the hands of others, and/or at the hands of a fallen universe. That's why I have spent a quarter-century developing a "Biblical Sufferology"—a theology and methodology of understanding and helping people to face their suffering in a godly manner—to grow in grace, to experience progressive sanctification as their faith is sustained and healed through the turmoil of trouble.

As far as some books that address sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding, the one that first introduced me to the concept was Clebsch and Jaekle's *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (New York: Harper, 1964). As far as someone who was a master pastor at "balancing" sin and suffering, Martin Luther is a phenomenal example. Volumes 48, 49, and 50 in *Luther's Works* contain his "Letters" which provide firsthand examples of brilliant pastoral work. Also, my work *Beyond the Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) shows how past African American brothers and sisters mastered the art of dealing both with suffering and sin. And my forthcoming work *Sacred Friendships* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2009) demonstrates how women soul care-givers and spiritual directors helped suffering and sinning people.

BCH: I will offer an observation and get your opinion. Sin and suffering rarely travel without one another. They are distinct, but rarely separate. Sin often creates consequences that outlast what can rightly be considered proportionate punishment. For instance, a man who chooses to drink and drive may incur a chronic injury that lasts for a lifetime. At some point surely we begin to comfort this man for his suffering instead of confronting him regarding his foolish sin. Suffering is a context in which many of the patterns of my flesh are given prime opportunity to reveal themselves. When someone is sick, their patience is less. During difficult economic times couples are faced with difficult decisions where there is not a "good" answer and conflict is much easier. Do you have any pastoral reflections on this interplay between sin and suffering?

RWK: Excellent, practical, relevant observation Brad, and I appreciate the opportunity to follow-up on this. Because we think in linear ways, we just about have to talk about concepts as a process. I talk about suffering and sustaining and healing, and then I talk about sin and reconciling and guiding. In reality, as you rightly point out, it is all mingled together. Someone has said that counseling is "spaghetti relationships." It's messy . . . because life is messy. We sustain, guide, reconcile, sustain, heal, reconcile, guide, etc., etc., etc. We deal with suffering, sin, sin, suffering, etc., etc., etc.

Here's a "case study" where I find this interplay frequently and powerfully at work: *counseling a victim of sexual abuse*. Imagine a married adult middle-age male disclosing for the first time in his life that from age eight-to-ten his Uncle sexually abused him. With tears, gasps, shame, halting words . . . he tells you his story. You are the first to ever hear . . . other than his parents who refused to believe him and told him never to falsely accuse his Uncle again. (By the way, I am not talking about "repressed memories"—I am talking about a man who never forgot this, but who was told, like Absalom told Tamar when she was



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raped by Amnon, to “be quiet”). Obviously, any Biblical counselor, upon hearing this horrifying story, will empathize, weep, care, comfort, and console (sustaining). Along the way and over time, the Biblical counselor will also encourage—will explore with this man how to see this horrible sin from God’s perspective and how to look at life once again with spiritual eyes, with faith eyes (healing).

But suppose as you interact, you also discern that this man is not loving his wife in a Biblical way, is not loving his children with Christ’s love. What then? He was not guilty of the sexual abuse. However, he is guilty of responding to the sexual abuse in non-God ways. Perhaps he is, like Adam and Eve, using coverings, and hiding, and being self-protective. Perhaps, in line with James 4:1-4, his response to being sinned against and his response to unmet legitimate longings is sinful manipulation and retaliation. And, also in line with James 4:1-4, perhaps he has substituted the love of the world for the love of God. Surely any Biblical counselor will slowly, gently, lovingly, yet boldly begin to explore and expose these areas (reconciling).

Does this get “touchy?” Absolutely! This man might respond negatively, saying to you, “I thought you were different. I thought you were loving and understanding. Why are you victimizing the victim? Why are you turning against me? I thought you said I was not guilty of the sexual abuse?”

Now “real and raw counseling” is essential. “I am loving you right now. I’m loving you in exploring possible sinful responses to your sexual abuse, just like I was loving you when weeping with you over the abuse that occurred to you. While you were not guilty of the original abuse, you, like all of us, have the great, sinful potential to respond in non-God, sinful ways to the horrible things that happen to us. . . .”

Brad, there is no way to get around the interplay of sin and suffering. Having both concepts in mind (soul care for suffering and spiritual direction for sinning—to use my terms) helps me greatly to be aware that inevitably both will come into play (often simultaneously) in any ongoing counseling/discipleship relationship.

Coordinating Four Pieces of One Dream

Dream Number Ten: Biblical Counseling Will Be Holistic In Equipping

Many training models for Biblical Counseling tend to focus either on content (Biblical truth), competence (relational skillfulness/counseling techniques), character (the counselor’s spiritual formation), or community (connecting as the Body of Christ). Future equipping in Biblical Counseling will make no division between content, competence, character, and community.

Scriptural insight, learned in the context of intimate Christian community and applied to the spiritual character development of the counselor-in-training, will result in the relational competency necessary to interact soul-to-soul and deeply impact others for Christ. This holistic, four-fold model, applied in lay, pastoral, and professional Christian counseling training, will produce maturing wounded healers.



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BCH: In dream ten (*Biblical Counseling Will Be Holistic in Equipping*), you speak of a four-fold model of equipping counselors that includes content, competence, character, and community. Would you take a bit more time to explain what you mean by these four pieces and how each of them inter-relates? As you do, would speak specifically to pastors who bear the responsibility to coordinate the pastoral care within a local congregation.

RWK: I take each of those from a **comprehensive** Biblical theology of equipping. At the same time, we can see each component in a classic Biblical Counseling verse: Romans 15:14. “*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*”

Paul addresses the saints as “brothers,” he speaks of “one another” in this verse, and the broader context includes the gathering of believers in small house churches. All of this speaks of *community*. We do not learn Biblical Counseling outside the context of Christian community. It is the “container,” as one of my Asian American students calls it, in which we develop content, character, and competence.

Pastors have the ideal opportunity for equipping people in the context/container of community. Practically speaking, I would plead with pastors to be sure their training of lay people in Biblical Counseling is not only through lecture. Yes, we need the lecture/theory/theology component. But we must have the small group interaction and sharing component. That means that training in lay counseling must involve sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding *one another*—not just in role play, but in real life. That’s why in, *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, I start every chapter with a section where small group members can share openly and honestly with one another—and can receive help from one another in dealing with issues of suffering and of sin.

Paul also says that the Roman believers are “full of goodness.” That’s the *character* piece. Goodness is one of the nine fruit(s) of the Spirit. Jesus and Paul also use it elsewhere to reflect the character of our good and gracious God. It has the core idea of a good heart that connects maturely to others in social relationships. If Biblical Counseling is about helping others to grow in grace, then the Biblical counselor must be growing day-by-day to be more like our good God.

This is another place where equipping lay counselors in the local church must include the small group interactive component. We grow in character in community as we receive honest, loving feedback from one another, and as we are affirmed and encouraged by one another. We stir up the gift of God in another. I also think that this is the place for pastors to teach their people the classic Evangelical spiritual disciplines as means of growing in Christlike character.

Paul continues by saying the Roman Christians were “complete in knowledge.” Of course, this is not encyclopedic knowledge of all things actual and possible. God alone has infinite knowledge. The phrase really means that we know the truth and the truth knows us. That is, the truth is setting us free. Thus *content* means both theological/Biblical knowledge *and* it means the ability to apply that knowledge to daily life—ours and others. This is why Paul says in Philippians 1:9 that our love must abound in depth of insight. *Content* is vital to the Biblical counselor, especially content like Creation, Fall, Redemption, Sanctification, Sufferology, Sin, Relational, Rational, Volitional, Emotional, Physical, Sustaining, Healing,



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Reconciling, Guiding, etc. Any Biblical counseling training program in the local church worth the name “Biblical” must include lecture/reading in these core theological concepts.

Finally, Paul says that the person who has *community, character, and content* will then be *competent* to instruct—to disciple, to counsel—*noutheteo*—to provide counseling for change out of concern for victory over sin. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, Paul uses another primary Biblical word for counseling—*parakaleo*—to highlight that the person with *community, character and content* will be *competent* to provide counseling for suffering and sanctification. As for the “how to,” we addressed that in an earlier question about “real and raw” counseling and how it requires real and raw training.

We do need a “balance” in this area. Secular models of counselor training are so soulless and mechanical with their focus on “meta-training” in specific bite-size aspects of techniques and skills. On the other hand, some models of counselor training go to the other extreme and assume that by osmosis, if someone knows content, has character, and is in community, that they will be competent. In *Spiritual Friends*, I try to address a “balance” here. Instead of discussing “skills” or “techniques,” I suggest the concept of “relational competencies.” What does the Bible teach, for instance, about the relational competency of “theology-guided listening”? In *Spiritual Friends*, we explore twenty-two such relational competencies providing readers with a small group experience of developing their God-giving capacity to offer *nouthetic* and *parakaletic* Biblical Counseling.

To me, the “4Cs” (community, character, content, and competence) provide a great “check-list” for any trainer of Biblical counselors. We all need to ask ourselves where we are strong and where we are weak in each of these areas. As I’ve seen the “lay of the land,” stereotypically training in Biblical Counseling has been very strong in content, has been somewhat strong in competence (but perhaps at times emphasizing skills over relational competencies), strong in character—insisting that the counselor must be modeling growth in grace, and not always so strong in community—missing at times the depth of relationship necessary for effective equipping as a Biblical counselor.

BCH: Your answer touches a subject that is dear to my heart—small groups. Unfortunately, “small groups” can be a phrase like “Biblical Counseling,” it can carry many different values and expressions. However, the core functions of a small group can have many different legitimate expressions. When you speak of small groups as a uniquely tailored setting for training lay counselors, what would be the essential aspects of those small groups you have in mind? Are there particular instructions or cautions you would give churches that use their small groups as an integral part of their lay counselor training and “one another” caring model? Would these instructions be different if small groups are expressed through Sunday School, home meetings, or other settings?

RWK: Brad, you are exactly right about how “small groups” like “Biblical Counseling” can both be defined Biblically or from a secular perspective. Unfortunately, when some Christians hear “small groups,” they think only of negative examples such as secular “encounter groups,” or Christian groups where you “pool your ignorance,” or secular twelve-step groups. They don’t necessarily think of the great Protestant heritage of Biblical small groups (think Luther and Wesley, for example). Nor do think necessarily reflect on the original “small groups”—the house churches in Acts.



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Because of this confusion, we require an entire three-semester hour course in local church small groups in our Christian counseling and discipleship Masters at Capital Bible Seminary. We want our students to understand a Biblical theology and methodology of small groups. Surely I don't have enough space here to duplicate forty hours of teaching, so I will have to be brief—and focus only on small groups as used for lay counseling training.

As a preliminary thought, your readers should remember what I mentioned earlier. Good local church training for lay counseling should have both a “lecture component” and a “lab component.” I suggest a weekly two-hour (minimum) meeting. The first hour is for lecture/content applied to life. The second hour is for lab—small group interaction focusing on community, character, and relational competency.

In local church lay counseling training, the first essential for successful small group lay counseling meetings is good communication about the nature of the training. I always advise that every person interested in being trained as a lay counselor be required to go through an “interview” process. This does not necessary mean that they would be screened in or out (I think that depends on the size, culture, history, and experience of the church). But it does mean that every person is told **ahead of time** about the nature of the training so that they can count the cost. This is exactly what we do with prospective students in our counseling MA. People need to know that this won't be “lecture only.” They need to know that they will be involved in small groups designed to work not only on their relational competencies but also on their character. They need to be given a picture of the “real and raw” nature of this—that “we are going to mess with each other's lives; we are going to empathize, encourage, expose, and empower each other.”

The second most important aspect of successful small group local church lay counseling training is *good material*. Small groups should *not* be pooling of ignorance. We need to use solid material that group members are *required* to respond to *before* and *during* the small group time. People can't “wing it.” That's another part of the initial interview process—we tell people how much time outside of “class” to expect to have to put into preparing for class.

The third aspect of successful small group local church lay counseling training is *qualified leadership*. Far too many of us “pastoral types” make small groups another academic exercise. If the material is good enough, deep enough, then the actual small group time can and should be spent not on re-lecturing what the students already read and responded to, but on character and competence. The small group leader uses the material not as a straight jacket, but as a “guide” and as a “jumping off point” to get the discussion started. Then the group leader always listens well and looks for opportunities to move from “head knowledge discussion” to real life heartfelt sharing. This is “easy” if the material is well written, if the leader models openness, and if the leader creates a safe group atmosphere of mutual grace-based acceptance and speaking the truth in love.