



**Discussing a Dozen Dreams (Part III of V):
Biblical Counseling Will Be Relational, Relevant, & Transformative**

*An Extended Conversation with Robert W. Kellemen, Ph.D.
By Bradley Charles Hambrick*

Case Study vs. Case Counseling

**Dream Number Five:
Biblical Counseling Will Be Relational**

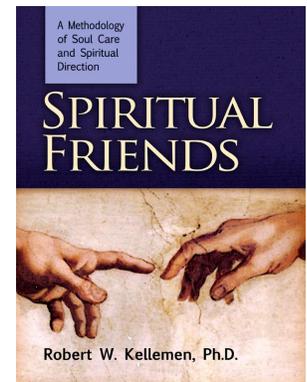
In the future, the Trinitarian roots of our faith will blossom, as Biblical counselors will be known by their fruit—the fruit of compassion and passion. As the God of the Bible is the eternal community of intimate Oneness, so Biblical counselors will eschew aloofness in favor of what one African American friend describes as “real and raw counseling.”

While techniques, skills, and tools of competency will not be ignored, soul-to-soul relating will be emphasized. When put into practice, those skills will highlight neither directive nor non-directive counseling. Rather, they will birth collaborative counseling where the counselor, the counselee, and the Divine Counselor form a triological relationship.

BCH: In dream number five, you highlight that *Biblical Counseling Will Be Relational*. When having a conversation with a fresh counseling graduate one of the questions I frequently ask is, “What is the difference between counseling in the classroom versus counseling in real life?” The correct answer (at least as I define correct) sounds something like, “Counseling in the classroom is about getting the right answer—diagnosis, confounding variables, risk factors, protocols, methodologies, and measurable progress. Counseling in real life is about helping a hurting person get to the right answers—clarifying confusion, displaying empathy, gaining trust, motivating effort, and encouraging perseverance in the right direction.” How much does this capture your dream of counseling being relational? Based upon your dream how would you correct, expand, or reframe my attempt to describe “real and raw counseling”?

RWK: Brad, while I understand how you explain the distinction when talking to a fresh counseling graduate, I would actually describe it differently. Here’s why: in our equipping at Capital Bible Seminary, we make *no* difference between how we train people and what we think they should do in “real life.”

Our *training* in Biblical Counseling *is* real and raw. If you were in one of our labs where we use *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology for Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* you would not simply learn theory about Biblical Counseling, you would *experience*





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Executive Director

Biblical Counseling. If you were hurting, we would weep with you—sob with you. If you were sinning, you would experience “bold love”—speaking God’s truth in love to you as we connected with you to empower you to find victory in Christ.

I was trained in a counseling program that was unlike this. We were told, “Do *not* try to replicate what you learn here in your local church. It won’t work.” That makes *no* sense to me. Why train people so that they have to *unlearn* their training?

So, our labs, our small group classes, and even our core theory/theology classes are all real and raw. Take our core theology class—Discipleship Counseling I—as an example. When we examine a Biblical theory of people, problems, and solutions, we look at real issues that real people face. We interact about it, share about it, illustrate it, role play it, and even counsel live about it when a class member, in our safe environment, trusts the group with his or her real life.

Thus, Biblical Counseling training *and* Biblical Counseling itself are *both* real and raw. Why? Because, as dream five states, *all* ministry ought to be based upon the Trinitarian roots of our faith. Reality is relational because God is relational—the eternal Community of mutual intimacy and admiration—eternally and perfectly shared love and shared glory.

With Biblical Counseling, that means that we ought to be collaborative, not directive nor non-directive. The counselor, the counselee, and the Divine Counselor form a *trialogue*—a three-way conversation. Together they explore how the Scripture and Biblical principles relate to the daily issues of human relationships with God, others, and self.

As a relational Biblical counselor, we don’t just dole out bromides about life. We live life with our counselee/parishioner. We engage him or her. We personally experience how he or she relates to us which gives us insight into his or her general way of relating to people. That’s soul-to-soul relational Biblical Counseling. It is what Paul talks about in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 where he says I loved you so much that I delighted not only to give you the Scriptures, but my own soul also.

BCH: Your answer sparks a conflict in my own mind and heart. I long for counseling, and counseling training for that matter, to be as community-based as you described—not just privately real in the confines of legally binding confidentiality, but vulnerably real in the context of Biblical community guided by the wisdom of Scriptural disclosure. Counseling too often carries these more guarded connotations. If I might confess, even in the para-church counseling center where I practice, getting hurting people who have been broken to the point of seeking help to be that “real and raw” can be a challenge. I hear significant overlap in the dream you describe and one of my favorite books by Paul David Tripp *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hand*. In a world (and too often church) where disclosure is much more “close to the vest” how do you equip your students to facilitate that kind of realness by someone who has not been in your classroom (or experienced something equivalent in their church or home)? I guess I am asking more particularly for the professional or para-church counselor. I can see how those attributes and emphases would be developed within the fellowship of a local church (that is one of the distinctives of Biblical Counseling I appreciate most). For students, or others you influence through the BCSFN, who aspire to minister outside but alongside the local church how do you advise them to overcome the obstacles of that setting: meeting a



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stranger to talk about life's problems, meeting on a scheduled basis with little interaction between sessions, having limited interaction with the counselee's extended sphere of relationships, etc...?

RWK: Wow. These are powerful follow-up questions, and vital ones. A decent percentage of the graduates from our MA program do go on to receive licensure and to work in "professional" settings. I worked for four years in a secular psychiatric inpatient hospital. I worked another two years in a private practice as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. And, even in my three pastoral ministries, I counseled *many* unchurched people. So, I believe it is not only possible, but essential that, regardless of the setting, our counseling is "soulful."

Why? First and foremost, it is Biblical! As I've noted before, Paul said that he loved the saints so much that he gave them not only the Scriptures but also his own soul (1 Thessalonians 2:8). He saw himself as a father (to Timothy) and like a birthing mother (to the Galatians).

Second, it (loving counseling relationship) is powerful. Paul talks about our love abounding in depth of insight (Philippians 1:9). He talks of speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Plus, valid descriptive research demonstrates consistently that the quality of the relationship between the counselor and the counselee is one of the greatest predictors of client change/growth.

How? How do we equip Biblical counselors who work outside the local church to be "real and raw"? First, as I've indicated, we train them in "real and raw" programs. Second, we give them permission—we introduce them to the Biblical evidence and the descriptive research. Third, we make sure that they know the difference between appropriate real and raw counseling and a counseling relationship that becomes unethical and unhealthy. Fourth, we provide ongoing supervision where the supervision is real and raw.

Once all that is done, then the counselor him or herself needs to communicate from the beginning to the counselee that for counseling to "work" openness is essential. One of my African American colleagues, Professor Mel Pride, has a powerful statement he makes to clients in the first session. "I am not a mind reader. So, if you give me a lie, I will counsel a lie. If you tell me the truth, I will counsel the truth."

Also, the counselor needs to be human. There is appropriate "counselor self-disclosure" that puts the counselee at ease, that helps the counselee to realize that it is okay to share deeply—about suffering and sin—because the counselor is willing, when appropriate, to share.

Additionally, the counselor *must* respond with grace, acceptance, love, forgiveness, etc. when the counselee does open up. Nothing destroys the potential for real and raw counseling like a judgmental, arrogant response when the counselee finally bears his or her soul.

Someone has said that counseling is the most intimate of relationships in the least intimate of settings. I've found that to be true. But the setting can be overcome by the heart—by the commitment of the Biblical counselor to engage the other person with soulful depth. Sadly, this is not always the "image" that comes to mind when one thinks of Biblical Counseling. But it certainly is the image that comes to mind when we remember *the Wonderful Counselor*—Jesus. How did He do ministry? And where did He do ministry? He did ministry in unconventional settings, often in crowds, often with strangers, but *always* with depth of loving



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Executive Director

engagement. He is our model—regardless of our setting. Biblical Counseling is relational because reality is relational because the Triune God of the universe is relational.

Unpacking Relevance in an Emotion

Dream Number Six: Biblical Counseling Will Be Relevant

The pejorative stereotype of Biblical Counseling as “take two verses and call me in the morning” will be replaced with the constructive identity of “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). When people think of the Biblical counselor, they will think of “Jesus with skin on” and be filled with words of hope like, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

It is not enough to promote the sufficiency of the Word if we do not also minister in such a way that demonstrates the relevancy of God’s Word. Problems in living that most people label only as psychological disorders, curable only by psychological methodologies, will be seen as spiritual, relational, mental, volitional, and emotional issues addressed in the Book of Life by the Author of Life so that we can live the abundant life (John 10:10).

BCH: Dream six states that *Biblical Counseling Will Be Relevant*. Could you use a brief case study involving an emotion (anxiety, depression, anger) and contrast the type of counsel that would be offered from a “take two verses” Biblical counselor with a “the truth will set you free” Biblical counselor?

RWK: First, I think we have to realize that hopefully no Biblical counselor worth the label “Biblical counselor” would really be such a stereotypically poor counselor. But for the sake of the illustration, the “take two verses and call me in the morning” counselor might be working with an adult male struggling with anxiety. Clearly, Philippians 2:6-7 would constitute two good verses. Based upon those two verses, *in isolation from the soul of the person and in isolation from the context of Scripture*, the so-called Biblical counselor might exhort the person to stop sinning by being anxious, and then explain to the person that the “cure” is prayer and petitions. One problem—one verse—one solution.

It’s ironic, but this mimics a prominent current model of *secular* therapy: brief solution-focused therapy. In this secular model, there is no primary “meta-narrative.” There is no absolute right or wrong. Instead, the counselor needs to identify what is troubling the person and help that person to implement changes in thinking and acting to remedy the problem.

Besides being a-theoretical (and thus lacking a Biblical theology foundation), it is *soulless*. I like to call truly Biblical Counseling *soul-ution* focused counseling. We focus on matters of the soul.

And how does the “truth-will-set-you-free”-Biblical counselor do that? It starts with a fully-developed theology of any life issue. For anxiety, I do not base my understanding of it simply upon one verse, or



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even one passage or book. I want to use the “hermeneutical spiral” (systematic theology, biblical theology, exegetical theology, lexical theology, contextual theology, spiritual theology, pastoral/practical theology, and historical theology) to understand anxiety. I want to explore the **entire** Bible to see the Creation (God’s original design), Fall (sin’s depravity of the soul), and Redemption (Christ’s restoration) of the soul as it relates to what we now label “anxiety.” I want to examine what the Bible says about anxiety as it relates to a **comprehensive** Biblical understanding of the image of God and thus of people as relational, rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings.

Based upon this comprehensive Biblical understanding, the Biblical counselor engages the person relationally and relevantly using the whole counsel of God. Even taking just Philippians 4 (and you certainly would explore much more than one chapter), notice how expansive the “soul-ution approach” would be. In Philippians 4:1, Paul addresses them as “brothers,” “whom I long for,” “my joy and crown,” and “dear friends.” Wow! That’s relational counseling!

He also says in verse one, “that is how you should stand firm in the Lord.” The “that” takes us back to Philippians chapters 1-3. So, now the truly Biblical counselor must use *all* of Philippians as she or he engages the person struggling against anxiety.

Since we don’t have the time or space for *all* of Philippians (much less *all* of the Bible), let’s return to Philippians 4:2-3. The context seems to indicate that somehow our interpersonal relationships are connected to struggles with anxiety. Paul urges the entire Body of Christ to help Euodia and Syntyche to work out their issues. So, I’m going to explore with this person his social relationships and his connection to the Body of Christ.

In Philippians 4:4-5, the theme is rejoicing in the Lord always. Now I am going to ponder with my counseling his spiritual relationship with the God of the universe—his longings, affections, desires, faith, hope, love, doubt, sin, etc.

In Philippians 4:6-8, we see a remarkable section that combines our relational, rational, and emotional capacities—all of these would be vital aspects of Biblical counseling “intervention.” And then in 4:9, we see our volitional capacity—our actions, reactions, motivations, actions, goals, and behaviors. So in the span of these few verses, Paul models for us a comprehensive relational engagement with a real person who relates, longs, thinks, chooses, acts, and feels.

Truly Biblical counseling *thinks* Biblically about “counseling issues.” We formulate Biblical conceptions of people, problems, and solutions (soul-utions). Then Biblical Counseling *relates* Biblically—relating Christ’s changeless truth to our changing times, relating God’s Word to human relationships.

BCH: Thanks for emphasizing the distinction between the stereotype of “take two verses and call me in the morning” and a truly Biblical counselor. I long for the day, and hope *The Journal of Counseling & Discipleship* can hasten its coming, when that distinction can go without saying. Your contextual application of Philippians 4 in light of Paul’s full ministry to the church at Philippi is very encouraging and an excellent example of counseling hermeneutics. The manner in which you point out and make application from the way Paul addresses the different aspects of human nature and the ministerial relationship from which Paul gave his admonitions is very instructive for counselors.



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When people outside Biblical Counseling talk to me about Biblical Counseling they often view it as “brief solution-focused therapy” to which you alluded. Their expectation is that if someone does not stop sinning after their counselor confronts the sin (and their expectation is often that any life struggle will be conceptualized as sin) and offers an appropriate, practical “put-off” then the counselor will quickly move to the next level of Matthew 18 church discipline. This does not represent the vast majority of people I know who would call themselves a Biblical counselor. Yet it remains the frequent concern of those who are informed enough to know the “camps” of Evangelical Christian Counseling. Is this a case, as we discussed in a previous conversation, of differing “camps” not listening well to one another, or do you see things being done/taught/written in Biblical Counseling that feeds this caricature?

RWK: The “modern” Biblical Counseling “movement” is still quite young. For various historical reasons, Protestants “dropped the ball” from about 1860 to 1960. In the process, we lost touch with 100s of years of communal wisdom. So, when men like Jay Adams “picked up the ball again,” he and others were working hard to pull us back to the basics. Simple things like—“Use the Bible in pastoral counseling!” “Sin must be dealt with!” All of that was right, necessary, but in some ways a first step, transitional steps. As Dr. Adams and others wrote more over the years, their models matured, developed. But some of their “followers,” perhaps, were stuck on the basics.

I see great growth in what I think of as the second and now even third generation of Biblical counselors. Folks like yourself and others in the ABC, folks at CCEF, folks with Faith Counseling Ministries, folks in the NANC, folks in the SCP, and in the BCSFN—they are all doing “hermeneutically informed” and “relationally-engaging” Biblical Counseling. But not everyone in other “camps” has noticed the development. That’s why your journal is so important—to help people to see the ongoing maturation of the Biblical Counseling movement.



**Dream Number Seven:
Biblical Counseling Will Be Transformative**

Biblical Counseling applies the principles of progressive sanctification to the daily lives of believers. It does so through spiritual formation, which cultivates communion with Christ and conformity to Christ through the practice of the Biblical/historical individual and corporate spiritual disciplines. Historically, these two fields of Biblical Counseling and spiritual formation were one. It is our dream that they once again become synonymous—hence our BCSF Network name and mission.

Such transformative Biblical Counseling will highlight God’s role and our responsibility in spiritual growth through its emphasis on the cultivation of the disciplines that connect us to Christ’s resurrection power. It will underscore the inner life through its emphasis on forming the character of Christ in us—our inner life increasingly mirroring the inner life of Christ. It will accentuate the Body of Christ by encouraging the corporate spiritual disciplines and by equipping believers in the individual spiritual disciplines.

Transformative Biblical Counseling will require the development of a **comprehensive** Biblical theology of the spiritual life that provides the basis for a relevant Biblical methodology for spiritual growth. Biblical Counseling and spiritual formation will offer a theological and practical approach to sanctification that is effective in the “real” world where people hope, dream, stumble, fall, and live every day.

BCH: As I read your seventh dream (*Biblical Counseling Will Be Transformative*), I am struck by your emphasis upon the role of corporate spiritual disciplines in personal transformation. A significant portion of the readers of *The Journal of Counseling & Discipleship* do their counseling as a part of their local church ministry. Would you take some time to discuss how to increase the transformative impact of traditional corporate disciplines and to highlight a couple of corporate disciplines that may be neglected?

RWK: I always tell my students, much to their surprise, since I am the Chairman of the *Counseling* department, that counseling is only *one* aspect of the Biblical process of progressive sanctification. In fact, that is why our MA is an MA in Christian Counseling *and Discipleship*. Counseling is a sub-set of discipleship. It is one means of being formed as disciples into the image of Christ.

Spiritual formation and the individual and corporate spiritual disciplines are yet another means of discipleship. I don’t think it is so much that we neglect these corporate disciplines necessarily, as that we fail to proactively and consciously think through, especially as pastors, the role of the corporate experience in progressive sanctification. It is almost as if we “do church” by rote, like painting by the numbers, instead of seeing church—the gathering of God’s people—as a time for mutual discipleship. Perhaps we should call our “Worship Service” a “Discipleship Service” that uses worship and fellowship to form us into Christ’s image.



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There are so many examples of how we could use the corporate spiritual disciplines, that perhaps the best way to illustrate what I mean is through the history of the enslaved African American church. In *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, we talk about the “Invisible Institution.” That was a name for the hidden church on the plantation where enslaved Christians would secretly gather for real worship and fellowship. Listen to this extended description, and see and feel all the many corporate disciplines utilized for progressive sanctification.

“Arrangements are then made for conducting the exercises. They first ask each other how they feel, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then select a certain space, in separate groups, for their division of the meeting. Preaching in order by the brethren; then praying and singing all around, until they generally feel quite happy. The speaker usually commences by calling himself unworthy, and talks very slowly, until feeling the spirit, he grows excited . . . The slave forgets all his suffering, except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming, ‘Thank God, I shall not live here always!’ Then they pass from one to another, shaking hands, bidding each other farewell, promising, should they meet no more on earth, to strive to meet in heaven, where all is joy, happiness and liberty. As they separate, they sing a parting hymn of praise.”ⁱⁱ

Wow! They start with corporate Biblical Counseling—asking how they feel and their state of mind—right in the “Worship Service”! They then do small group discipleship—meeting in separate groups—right in the “Worship Service”! They then are fed by the Word—preaching that impacts their lives. They also saw the spirituals as a form of worship, fellowship, and discipleship—they ministered to each other in song. Further, they connected around issues of suffering and they shared together a Biblical, eternal perspective on trials. Finally they fellowshiped here with a view toward the next life and how it makes a difference in this life.

Again, *we* do much of this already. But for the great cloud of African American witnesses, they understood how desperately they needed Sunday morning for the *rest of the week*. One Black preacher explained it this way.

“Meetings back there meant more than they do now. Then everybody’s heart was in tune, and when they called on God they made heaven ring. It was more than just Sunday meeting and then no more godliness for a week. They would steal off to the fields and in the thickets and there, with heads together around a kettle to deaden the sound, they called on God out of heavy hearts.”ⁱⁱⁱ

They came together, brought their real life struggles to one another and to God, and what they experienced on Sunday morning they applied Monday through Saturday. They were a church *of* Biblical Counseling and spiritual formation, not just a church *with* Biblical Counseling and spiritual formation.

We need to follow their example today if we are to see ourselves transformed into Christ’s image. We need to consciously plan our “Worship Services” as “Discipleship Services.” Nothing worships and glorifies God more than a loving, holy life that imitates Christ.

BCH: I am married to a history teacher, so I must admit how much I enjoy the historical illustrations with which you flesh out your points. If I am hearing you correctly, you are saying that most churches do not



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need to add any particular corporate discipline to their services. Most churches have the essential and most beneficial corporate disciplines in their services. What we need is more intentionality in what we are doing and awareness of how God intends to use these practices redemptively in our corporate gatherings. Assuming I have captured the gist of what you are saying, if a pastor came to you and asked for a set of questions he could use to guide his reflection/evaluation of each aspect of the worship service and church life what questions would you give him? In what order would you advise him to evaluate the worship service? Who would you advise him to include in the reflective/evaluative process?

RWK: Brad, I would say most of our churches have in place the types of “settings” that could allow for the types of corporate disciplines necessary for corporate spiritual growth. *However*, how many of our churches actually *do* what the African American church did in the “Invisible Institution”? We may take sixty seconds to “greet someone sitting near you,” but do we break up into groups to talk about our emotional, mental, and spiritual health? That’s just one example. For many of us as pastors, we are so busy with the details of the “worship hour” that we give little intentional (I like that word choice of yours) thought to the “discipleship hour.”

So, my first question for the pastor would be one about “pastoral image.” “How do you see yourself—are you simply the ‘preacher?’” “Are you simply the ‘CEO?’” “Or, are you the ‘Congregational Discipleship Pastor?’” A Biblical pastoral identity was so important to me when I was “Sr. Pastor” that I refused the title “Sr. Pastor.” Instead, I took the title I just mentioned: “Congregational Discipleship Pastor.” That did not mean that I was solely in charge of the discipleship of the congregational. It did mean that I saw myself, and I wanted our people to see me, as having as my first task the work of *overseeing* that we were being disciplined together—that as a community we were corporately growing into the image of Christ.

As “overseer” of congregational discipleship/spiritual formation, the “Sr. Pastor” needs to think beyond the “worship service.” We need to step back and ask ourselves how every aspect of our ministry is or is not assisting in forming members increasingly into the image of Christ.

We can see the “Worship Service” (or the “Discipleship Service” or the “Corporate Spiritual Formation Service”) as the catalyst for everything else that occurs during the week. That one service does not have to *do* all the discipleship. But it should communicate the *vision* of corporate spiritual disciplines. People should leave that service so hungry for more, that they ask, “How can I join a small group?” “How can I be equipped?” “How can I be disciplined?”

Perhaps that is the best “evaluator.” Are people leaving the “Worship Service” encouraged for more, thirsty for more?

ⁱRobert Kellemen and Karole Edwards, *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007, 130-132.

ⁱⁱ*Ibid.*, 122.