

Biblical Counseling Training

This year's biblical counseling training pulled everything together from year one, plus gave me a deeper, richer understanding of my walk with God, my purpose to grow in Christ and serve Him as well as my responsibility to Him. I cannot signal one thing out that impacted me the most, nor state that anything was not critical to my overall development. Everything together had a profound impact on me from the exams, Case Studies, Conflict Pattern Project, Tests and reading assignments.

Exams Have Been Life Changing:

The hundred and fifty plus hours spent on the exams have given me a deeper understanding and solidified my thinking on both exam categories (theology and biblical counseling). The time spent to think through the issues, research and articulate them in each exam impacted me in a way that gives me a bigger picture of God's plan of redemption and sanctification. The exercise of doing the exams solidified many areas I was not clear on before and allowed me to see how everything (from a biblical world view) works together and fits together.

For years I read my bible, went to bible studies, church services, etc. and yet did not understand or have a structure on how to interpret problems biblically and how to work on specific problems in a biblical way; I just didn't put it all together until this year. This alone is life changing for me. Knowing how to identify problems of sin, interpret them biblically and apply God's Word with persistent obedience to God's way impacted my life; I never really understood this before in a practical way.

One thing I do struggle with is remembering everything. I have a plan to review everything (scripture, exams, reading reports, charts, etc) on regular basis (daily). I don't want to lose all this teaching. As I review everything and hopefully retain it, my hope is I will be able to use it in counseling sessions or just in conversation helping others.

Conflict Pattern Project:

Knowing and experiencing how to change and grow in Christ is life changing for me. I have a passion to grow in Christ and please Him. The Conflict Pattern project allowed me to experience practically how to change God's way. It was through this exercise that I experienced the joys, sorrows, successes and failures of practically pursuing obedience to God. This experience has given me wisdom that I can use to share and empathize with others I will counsel.

I learned 7 important keys to successfully growing in godliness. The first important key is that whatever I work on MUST be specific to my problem. Generalizing problems and solutions will never work. To have success in growing in Christ requires specifically identifying a problem (or sin issue) and having a specific and quantifiable action plan to solve the problem. A second important key to success is accountability. Knowing I had to send a weekly journal of my progress on my Conflict Pattern Project helped me persevere. Without accountability I believe perseverance will most likely be short lived. Thirdly, is not giving up and striving to reach the goal. It is very important to develop spiritual disciplines (habits) to grow and continue to grow in Christ. Even the most godly person can fall into complacency or plateau in the spiritual growth process, no one is exempt. We live in a culture that wants everything instantly and gives up too easily. Perseverance in the spiritual disciplines is an important key to changing and growing spiritually. A fourth key to changing biblically is to replace the sinful habit with a new godly habit. It's not to be put off alone, we have to put something else on (replace not

omit). I found I needed to not just stop doing something but I must become something else. In my case I must stop trying to control a situation and start leaving room for God to work. I needed to grow in trusting God and His sovereignty; so I put off a controlling spirit and put on a trusting spirit (which includes prayer and dependence on God). Fifthly an important key is renewing the mind. It is very important to be thinking, reading, meditating and praying for God's help. In my case (during the Conflict Pattern Project) I read 5 books on the subject of God's sovereignty over a 6 month period and meditated every few hours on passages like Phil 4:5-7; 2 Cor 5:9; Rom 8:28-29. Not only did I meditate on these passages I strived to live them out and not just know them. As part of this exercise I discovered the benefit from re-reading. For me it seems the first time I read scripture or books I understand it conceptually, but the second and third readings usually cause the principles to sink deeper into my thinking which changes me. The sixth key is journaling. For me having a written record gave me a way to measure my progress and made the process of spiritual growing visible on paper; which helped me keep a focus on the progress of my goal. The seventh important key that I discovered is how I will fail if I try to change in my own effort without God. It is God doing the work in me that changes me as I pursue spiritual disciplines. This became more evident when I saw events and circumstances God ordered into my life which helped me in the growing process.

Dangers of Not Changing

I'd like to also point out that I realized this semester the dangers of not pursuing godliness and how sins can become complex sins. One sinful response can lead to another sinful response and soon the sinful responses have become seemingly overwhelming. Although I have not experienced this personally, this concept is new to me and gives me a sense of urgency for the continued pursuing and elimination of all sin areas in my life as well as our counselees. This concept has deepened my understanding of the battle we are fighting and the need to be on guard all the time (Prov 4:23; Gen 4:7).

Thought Life and Controlling Emotions

Something else I learned on my own personal battles with sin is the critical importance of controlling one's thought life; and how the active thinking about something (action) can lead to stimulating emotions. For example it's now summer time and many women are dressed provocatively. If I don't control what I see and think I can quickly stimulate my emotions lustfully which become a much harder battle to overcome. If I guard my thoughts, I guard my emotions, which helps me not be tempted to sin. This realization came to me as we studied how actions lead to emotions. This concept is a breakthrough understanding for me on how important it is to think correctly (have the correct theology) and not give room for the flesh to tempt me. In turn this gave me a greater appreciation for the Y diagram and our need to master sin (Gen 4:7) and not let temptation get the opportunity to stimulate the emotions. Once the emotions are stimulated it is harder (not impossible) to overcome the temptation.

In conclusion the whole biblical counseling experience has been life changing and I think every Christian should go through a similar program.

Mike Vos
August 24, 2014