

**Building the Vision, Leaving a Legacy**  
*The Biblical Counsel of a Healthy Church (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*  
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 9, 2022

## Introduction

- ❖ For those of you who are new, you should know that we've been in a sermon series this Fall focused on our church's vision. We passed a new vision statement last year that helps describe the kind of church we aim to be, and one of the emphases is on being an equipping church. A church that intentionally equips its own members for the work of ministry. And one of the ways to do that – that we've been praying and dreaming about – is to establish, within our church, a Christian counseling ministry.
  - **Our vision is to develop, in the near future, a ministry that provides biblical counseling services – first to our members but eventually opening it up to the community.** This kind of counseling would be provided by well-trained, and possibly certified, counselors who come from among our members. The plan is to equip and mobilize a team of lay counselors trained to offer counseling. It could be for young couples needing premarital counseling. Or couples dealing with a troubled marriage. Or individuals who feel enslaved to destructive patterns of thought or behavior. We hope this future ministry will bring wholeness and healing for believers among us and even non-believers around us if they're open to Christian counseling.
  
- ❖ Now you might be thinking, “That sounds great. I hope they find enough lay counselors among our members. Because there's no way that would include me. I would have no idea what to do. I wouldn't know how to approach counseling someone.” I get it. **Counseling sounds like a very specialized skill that you're just unfamiliar with.**
  - That's probably what some of you are thinking. But I'd disagree. When it comes to the kind of counseling we envision, I think you're much more familiar with it than you give yourself credit for. I assume most of you would know how to approach this kind of counseling. Not because you've gone through some kind of formal training. But because you've been sitting under the kind of preaching we do here at HCC. **Sitting under expository preaching week after week has gone a long way already in preparing you to be involved in what you might call expository counseling.**
    - This morning I have three things I want to accomplish. First, I want to explain the concept of expository counseling. Second, I want to show you the theological convictions undergirding expository counseling. And third, I want to consider the unique characteristics of expository counseling.

## The Concept of Expository Counseling

- ❖ Let's start with this concept of expository counseling. As I said, it's intimately tied to the concept of expository preaching. Now if you've been here long enough, you know preaching is highly valued in this church. **You know that we believe God is a speaking God.**
  - That “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, [he] spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” (Heb 1:1-2) And this revelation of God the Son – the truth that he taught and the truth that he lived out in his perfect life, his sacrificial death, and his victorious resurrection – this truth (this revelation) has been preserved for us in Holy Scripture.

- ❖ Which is why, in our day, we believe God still speaks to us whenever his Word is rightly preached. **That's why we place a priority on gathering for corporate worship every Lord's Day to sit under the right preaching of his Word.**
  - Because we want to hear from God. Because we don't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God – mediated through the faithful preaching of Scripture by a faithful preacher (Mt 4:4). **That's why our church prioritizes Word-centered, expositional preaching.**
  
- ❖ **In case you're not familiar with that term, *expositional preaching* is an approach to preaching where the preacher relies on the main thrust of the text he's preaching to shape and guide his sermon.** So instead of approaching the Bible with an idea already of what you want to say and now you're just seeking to support that with biblical texts – the expositional preacher will approach his text looking for a main idea to preach that's based on the main idea of the text.
  - The advantage of this kind of preaching is that you mitigate the potential of misapplying a text out of context. It helps you to avoid cherry picking verses. And it clears a path for the bare Word of God to speak to your listeners. Because the end goal is to proclaim – not the thoughts of man – but the words of God.
  
- ❖ Now, ironically, we're not exactly preaching expository messages in this vision series. As I explained in our first message, there are times where we will preach more thematic or topical sermons. But the default, steady diet of our pulpit ministry is expository. And the longer you worship with us, the more obvious that will be. **And I think because of your exposure to expository preaching, you're already familiar with expository counseling.** It's not as unfamiliar of a concept as you might think.
  
- ❖ Granted, there are different approaches to Christian counseling that different churches are going to take. And there are pros and cons for each. **But the approach we're going with is commonly known as biblical counseling.** This approach made the most sense to us because of its continuity with our pulpit ministry. **Essentially, we're going to take the same theological convictions and ministry practices found in the preacher's pulpit and carry it over to the counselor's chair.**
  - So that would mean the same Word-centeredness that you've come to expect out of our preaching should be characteristic of our counseling. **You should expect the same carefulness in handling God's Word from your counselor as you'd expect from your preacher.** Not falling into the common error of just cherry picking verses, taking Scripture out of context.
  
- ❖ Now in this approach to counseling, we're not completely ruling out the use of any insights from modern psychology. **But our approach will be cautious because modern psychology is not a purely objective, empirical science.** It is heavily theory-laden, resting on philosophical assumptions about human nature. Psychology tends to locate the root all of the various problems we face is in something other than our sin.

- ❖ **So as Christians, approaching counseling with an expository mindset, that means we'll let Scripture have the final word and allow it to critique any wisdom that we might glean from the world.** That's what you would expect any faithful preacher to do.
  - If I stood in this pulpit and just expounded on the insights I gleaned from sociologists and psychologists about the dangers of social media usage on our mental health – and if I just sprinkled in a few Bible verses to back up my point – you might feel helped.
- ❖ But, as a sermon, I'm sure that most of you would feel like something is off. It sounds more like a lecture. Maybe a Sunday school lesson. **But when listening to a sermon – because of long exposure to expository preaching – you've been trained to expect Scripture to be the primary source of insight.** So if the preacher references secular sources of wisdom, it should only be sprinkled in to support or to illustrate the text of Scripture.
  - You have that intuitive sense when it comes to preaching. We want you to have that same sense and expectation when it comes to counseling. **Because our church's counseling ministry will be an extension of our pulpit ministry.**

### **The Convictions of Expository Counseling**

- ❖ That's what we envision. **In continuity with expository preaching, we want to offer people expository counseling – the kind that places a priority on Scripture to shape and guide our counsel.** The reason why we want to be so Word-centered is because expository preaching and expository counseling share the same theological convictions.
  - Let's consider the convictions of expository counseling. There are two in particular. **First, it's the conviction that God's Word is authoritative. And, second, that God's word is sufficient – sufficient both to save you and to sanctify you.** Both of these convictions are drawn from our text this morning – from 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- ❖ Let me give you some background. The Apostle Paul is writing to his disciple Timothy who's pastoring the church in Ephesus. **Timothy was facing opposition from false teachers who were challenging the gospel Paul had passed down to the Ephesians.**
  - So Paul has been telling Timothy to not be ashamed of the Gospel (1:8), to follow the pattern of sound words he learned from him (1:13), to guard those gospel doctrines (1:14), to endure suffering for it (2:12), and to rightly handle the word of truth (2:15). And at the start of chapter 4, he's going to tell Timothy to just “*preach the word.*”
    - **Why is Paul exhorting Timothy to be so Word-centered – to give it such priority in his preaching and teaching?** He tells us why in chapter 3:16-17. It's because of Scripture's inherent authority and its sufficiency.
- ❖ Look with me at v16. It says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*” Now in some older English translations, it says all Scripture is ‘*inspired by God*’ or ‘*given by inspiration of God*’. Perhaps you've heard of the doctrine of inspiration. It's the idea that Scripture is breathed out by God. That's what v16 literally says. The Greek means ‘God-breathed’. **Paul is saying that all Scripture originates from the breath (mouth) of God.**

- ❖ Picture this image. When God speaks – when he exhales his breath – what comes out? Scripture. He breathes out Scripture. So that means if you want to hear God’s voice – if you want to hear him speaking to you – then listen to Scripture.
- ❖ Now granted, in v16, Paul is not fleshing out a full theory of inspiration. He’s only addressing God’s contribution to Scripture. The human component is not mentioned. For that, you’d have to consider a text like **2 Peter 1:21**, “*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”
  - So Peter, along with Paul, affirms that all Scripture ultimately originates, not in the will of man, but in the will of God. **And it’s communicated through his breath to human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit to record God-inspired words on the pages of Scripture.**
- ❖ Theologians describe this as the dual authorship of Scripture. On one hand, the biblical authors were consciously engaged in the writing process, incorporating their unique personalities and styles. **But ultimately the Spirit of God was superintending the entire process, so that every word recorded in Scripture is the word that God intended to record and every meaning intended by the human author, God intended to mean.**
  - No other book, no other source of revelation, no other authority is breathed out by God. So why is that important? Think about it. **If we believe Scripture alone is breathed-out by God, then Scripture alone is our highest authority.** That’s the call of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is our highest and final authority.
- ❖ Now that doesn’t mean we have to dismiss all other authorities. **Again, when it comes to expository, biblical counseling, that means we don’t have to outright reject all the insights of modern psychology or deny the physiological dimension of illnesses like schizophrenia or bipolar depression.** Biblical counseling is not anti-medication. But it does caution us *not* to put our hope in medicine.
- ❖ As Christians, we recognize that humans have a body *and a soul*, so we can’t fall into the reductionism that treats all psychological problems as chemically-based and resolvable by medication. **Medical treatment can help stabilize you, so that you’re in a state of mind where you can better receive biblical counseling.**
  - Medicine might be able to decrease the intensity of your anxiety or your depression, but it can’t provide what you’re actually looking for when you see a counselor. It can’t provide hope, significance, and purpose. You go to the Word of God for that.
- ❖ But I want to be clear. We should be willing to learn from the insights of various disciplines. We’re not saying Scripture is our only source of knowledge. Our motto is not *Solo Scriptura*. Let’s learn from other authorities. **But if we believe in *Sola Scriptura* – that Scripture is our highest and final authority – then Scripture has the right to either confirm or to critique other authorities.** That’s why, in our approach to counseling, we’ll take a cautious (and sometimes critical) stance towards psychological findings and psychiatric treatments.

- ❖ **And we're going to prioritize the Bible in our counseling methodology because of our second theological conviction, namely the sufficiency of Scripture.** Look back at our text, “<sup>16</sup>*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”
  - Notice how it says complete. **It doesn't say all Scripture is profitable, so that the man of God might sort of have enough for every good work.** That he might be partially equipped. As if he needs to rely on a few additional sources of knowledge before he's fully equipped.
  
- ❖ No, the whole point is that Scripture is enough. Scripture is sufficient. **It's sufficient to save you according to v15.** Look at the last part. Paul says the sacred writings (Scripture) is “*able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” **Scripture alone is sufficient to present you with knowledge about Christ Jesus that can save you – if coupled with faith in Christ Jesus.**
  - What this means for Christian counseling is that – no matter what presenting issue drives someone to seek counseling – **we approach all forms of human brokenness as ultimately a problem of worship – of worshipping the wrong things.** Human beings were made to worship God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So when we disorder our worship and make idols out of created things, the result is disintegration. Our lives begin to fall apart. Negatively affecting our physical health, our mental health, our emotional health, our spiritual health.
  
- ❖ **The solution to our problem – the wise counsel we need – is not to be told that we need to love ourselves or learn to forgive ourselves.** The counsel we need is to be told that God can forgive you. That God can lead you to repentance – to reorder your worship and set your heart on Christ alone.
  - What you need most of all is salvation. And the good news is that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is sufficient to save you. And the Bible is sufficient to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. That message is central to the counsel we want to offer to hurting people whose lives are falling apart.
  
- ❖ **But just as Scripture is sufficient to save the lost, our text emphasize that it's also sufficient to sanctify the saved.** Paul says it's profitable for training us in righteousness. To help us grow spiritually. To conform us more and more into the righteousness of Christ. **If God's Word is that sufficient, then why, in a counseling setting, would we not first turn to Scripture and spend significant time studying passages together.**
  - If Scripture is profitable and sufficient enough to teach us *and* to reprove us; to train us *and* to correct us – then what else do we need? This is what you want in a healthy counseling setting. We don't want pure affirmation and encouragement. But neither do we want constant criticism and correction. It's Scripture that gives us that perfect balance of teaching and correction.

- ❖ That's why expository counseling involves a heavy dose of studying Scripture together. **Because when hurting, needy people are guided in reading a God-breathed book, they begin to experience something powerful.** It's not like reading a normal book.
  - When you read a normal book, you're reading for information. You read *it*. You interpret *it*. But Scripture is unique. It's the living Word of God. **You not only read and interpret Scripture. Scripture reads and interprets you.**
    - The Bible doesn't just tell you about sin. It exposes your sin. It doesn't just teach you the right thing to worship or the right way to live. It convicts you in all the ways you've misordered your worship and messed up your life.
      - But at the same time, Scripture doesn't just tell you stories about Jesus. It personally introduces you to him and invites you to lay down your life at the feet of the One who laid down his life for you on the cross. **Scripture reveals a loving Savior who can save even you.**

### **The Characteristics of Expository Counseling**

- ❖ No other book does this. No other book reads you and interprets you like Scripture. That's why the reading and study of God's Word is such an important feature of the kind of counseling we want to offer at our church. **Let me wrap up by quickly highlighting a few characteristics of expository counseling.** That's so that you get a better idea of what to expect down the road when, Lord-willing, our counseling ministry is up and running.
- ❖ Like I've been saying, you're more familiar with what it's going to look like than you might expect. But perhaps you're picturing yourself laying down on a long couch. With a counselor seated behind you taking notes on a notepad. That might be what's familiar to you, but that's not typical of expository, biblical counseling. Instead, picture a room with a desk and two chairs. **Picture two open Bibles and two people working through passages of Scripture.** Letting the Word read and interpret them. Letting it ask penetrating heart questions. In other words, picture the familiar scene of a bible study but just between two people.
- ❖ And in this session of expository counseling, you can expect a counselor to – not just quote a few verses tied to a bunch of advice – but to walk you through whole passages of Scripture. **The biblical counselor will help you apply Scripture in its context.** Like a good preacher.
  - And like a good preacher, the expository counselor won't just send you away with good advice on how to change your outlook or behavior. No, the good counselor will take the **law of God** found in a passage and use it to prick your conscience. Then take the **promises of God** in that same passage and apply them to your heart motives. And then take the **grace of God** in that text – connect it to the gospel – and use it to encourage your soul to trust in Christ, worship Christ, and follow Christ in obedience.
    - That's what I hope you see take place in this pulpit whenever we preach expository sermons. And that's what I hope to see take place in the future counseling center we hope to construct in that upcoming building project that we'll talk about after service today.

- ❖ Church, I hope you see why we're going with expository, biblical counseling as our approach to a counseling ministry. It feels the most familiar to us. So hopefully that'll make it more likely that you'll avail yourself of biblical counseling. Because it won't seem as foreign or shameful. Because it's so familiar.
  - **But I also hope that'll inspire some of you to pursue training in biblical counseling and perhaps be willing to serve, down the road, on our lay counseling team.** Blessing others with sound expository counseling. We're thinking about setting aside some funds next year to help financially subsidize the costs for those who feel called to pursue that training. Please reach out to me if you're sensing that call.