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DIAGNOSIS: BUSY (WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?)

by Steven L. Voss, M.S., M.A., L.M.F.T.

Being too busy is a problem in the lives of many people. Zeal for activities, ministry, and commitments to overfilled schedules, rob us of the time needed to be intimately connected with God and others. God's word to Elijah is timeless: "What are you doing here?" We need to ponder this question often to stay spiritually and relationally healthy.

I sat and listened intently as the couple poured out their story. Their marriage was in trouble and they now sought my help in hopes of saving it. They were a "yours, mine and ours" family with each having children from previous marriages and now their own children. As they told their story and provided clues to the debacle they were now in, it became apparent their lives were full, busy, and running at high speed. I had heard it before: Married people deeply in love in the beginning of the relationship and then they got busy. Business as in busy-ness is frequently the diagnosis behind the diagnosis. Business is damaging not only to relationships, but also to individuals. It may be the "disease" of our time.

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I understood it well. My own marriage experience helps me empathize with the couples I work with. I have made many of the same mistakes my clients have made, including the mistake of business. As I listen to couples describe the disease of business, I know the impact on my own life. Even though I have learned this lesson in the past, I find myself sometimes needing to relearn it. Unlike measles where you only catch it once and then you are immune, this disease is more like the common cold. It comes back from time to time unless you take measures to prevent it. This disease sneaks up on a person quickly. Over the years I have learned better how to prevent it, but I find that it can reemerge quickly and in a stealth-like fashion. Last summer I had to again deal with business. To restore balance, I took time to go to the mountains for a time of solitude and revitalization.

My solo backpacking trip to the mountains gave me time to reflect and allow God to work his soothing balm into my soul. I needed to undo the effects of business and get off the treadmill of numerous activities and responsibilities. In my alone time with God, I was impressed with a scripture from 1 Kings 19. The story of Elijah provides several angles to teach a multitude of spiritual truths. However, the spiritual truth that struck me the most was the phrase found in verses 9 and 13. In both verses, God's message to Elijah is "*What are you doing here?*" Proper hermeneutics is important for understanding the context and meaning of any Bible passage. However, the spiritual truth of this question to Elijah goes beyond the immediate context. The question is important for our own lives and for the people we work with in counseling. "*What are you doing here?*" God sometimes asks very blunt questions!

As I explored the business of their lives with the couple in my office and how they got there, it became clear that long hours at work for both partners, unending childcare needs, and learning to be a family was overwhelming. Like Elijah, they were exhausted. Over a year's time, the satisfaction they once shared in each other's company first began to wane and then they began to blame. The zeal they once had for each other was buried deep under a wrapping of feeling tired, misunderstood, and, with a lack of communication skills to process it, they were stuck. The progression from wane to blame is common in marital discord. If the symptoms can be recognized early and if the couple has skills and psychological adjustment to understand what is going on, they can likely deal with it, make the adjustments and move on. In a fallen world plagued with sin and brokenness it is more likely they will experience deterioration in their relationship and then add blame and anger accompanied by a good dose of hurt. This cycle compounds their difficulties. By the time a couple comes to see me, they have often tried to escape the hurt with threats of divorce because to get away is all they know to do. It is in this moment that God's question is relevant: "*What are you doing here?*"



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I sat in my camp at 8,000 feet and took in the grandeur of God’s beauty while pondering this timeless question in my own life. I had a busy client load and a difficult spring semester at the university where I teach. My own business and overload was easily recognized. I knew the antidote was to stop and listen to God. In my meditation of 1 Kings 19, I was reminded that God often appears in a whisper (1 Kings 19: 12-13). The question “*What are you doing here?*” needed to be answered. I was spiritually and physically tired. How did I get here? I knew the answer. I was too busy and had not left time for the quiet voice of God to be heard. In the “noise” of my work, there was no room for solitude and rest. I suspect Elijah knew this too but in his zeal, he had lost his hearing for the whisper of God. I had to again learn the importance of solitude and quiet time for God. Like Elijah, my zeal can sometimes surpass my need for solitude and time with God. Being busy for God is not the same as staying intimately connected to God, or to one’s partner.

The parallel for marriage is not hard to grasp. Just as I intentionally went to the mountains to have God rejuvenate my soul in a quiet place where I could hear his whisper, couples need time to get away from the routines and business to take time to hear each other’s voice. Concealed by the wind and earthquake of their business and marital problems, there is a message they need to hear from each other. The specific message may vary but it is often a message of “Do you still love me?” Or, “Am I impor-

tant to you?” Insecurity with how these questions are perceived to be answered often leads to defensiveness and distance to provide emotional protection. One of our jobs as counselors is to help them hear the message under the storm. To do this, I guide them to stop so they can hear each other. As I need quiet times of reflection with God to maintain my spiritual health, marriages need quiet times of solitude with each other to maintain relational health. When the partners in the marriage take time for God’s whisper in their personal lives and take quiet times with each other they move toward spiritual and relational balance. Business is a cultural issue we must all wrestle with. To keep ourselves in check, we need to frequently let God ask us, “*What are you doing here?*” As counselors and pastors, we must model the behavior of solitude with God and our spouses, so we can honor God, and stay strong in the work God has called us to do.



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THEOLOGICALLY- INFORMED COUNSELING

by Melissa Carlisle, MAMFC, ALC

What is the essential nature of Christian counseling? This article explores some of the basic biblical characteristics of Christian counseling and the different views or approaches proposed by Christian counselors.

The nature and purpose of counseling

Counseling is a means of sanctifying and restoring that which is broken and hurting. This idea of counseling includes caring for the soul, by acknowledging personhood, as well as engaging and addressing individuals in the deepest and most profoundly human aspects of their lives (Benner, 2000). As we consider humanity's fallen nature, the inclination to sinful choices, and the consequences of sin (McMinn, 2008), the process of healing and restoration belongs with the only One who can truly provide it.



IN ITS PUREST AND MOST AUTHENTIC FORM, A **CHRISTIAN COUNSELOR'S MISSION** IS TO FACILITATE A COUNSELING PROCESS WHICH MODELS THAT OF GOD'S CARE FOR THE SOULS OF HIS CREATION.

In Genesis 3, we read of God's first "crisis counseling intervention," as He draws Adam and Eve out of hiding, following their sinful engagement with the serpent (Jones, 2006). Following this encounter, we continue to see God's providential care for the brokenness of man and his desire for reconciliation.

In its purest and most authentic form, a Christian counselor's mission is to facilitate a counseling process which models that of God's care for the souls of His creation. The model to emulate God's care in counseling is expressed in Isaiah 11:1-2.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

This passage, a description of the Master Counselor (Isaiah 9:6), provides a model of caregiving and biblical counseling. In his work *The Counsel of Heaven on Earth*, Jones discusses the characteristics and qualities of "The Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding," "The Spirit of Knowledge and Power," and "The Spirit of the Knowledge of God and the Fear of God." He defines wisdom as,

The ability to recognize the true relationship between things, in order to determine the correct decisions to make at the right time; to fully comprehend or correctly appraise a situation in complete detail to determine the appropriate way to proceed in the matter. (Jones, 2006)

Recognizing the limitations of humanity, this pursuit of godly wisdom is needed in order to understand humanity's position and relationship to God, recognize God's superior nature to humanity, and understand God's disdain of sin and his plan for reconciliation. This wisdom will lead people to crave God, show mercy, experience cleansed hearts and bring people into fellowship with God (Jones, 2006).

Jones defines "understanding" as the ability to divide something into its various parts, the power to discern the true nature of a thing, and the ability to see into the inner being of an individual. This pursuit of godly understanding allows humanity to try and connect, looking to the heart of a person, and ministering to the depth of the soul (Jones, 2006).

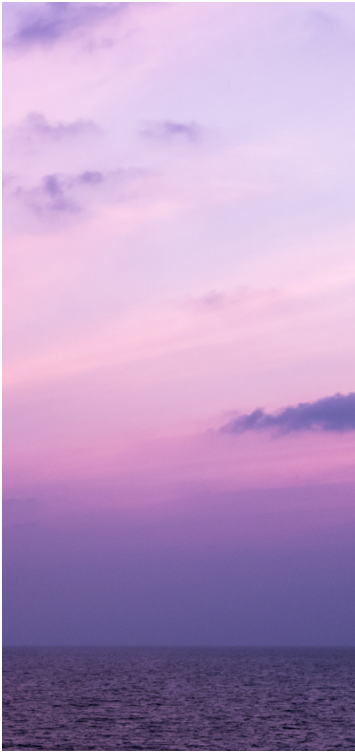
Next, the spirit of knowledge and power is a shift to the focus of abilities and assets of the individual. Knowledge, here, is defined as the awareness of truth, the ability to correctly assess a situation and determine how to proceed. Christian counselors must seek this Spirit of knowledge in wise planning for how to proceed. Even more, the counselor must rely on the Spirit of power to execute the plan and produce change. Counseling requires the assessment of the level of power in the counselees, as well as the power available to them in Christ, through the Holy Spirit (Jones, 2006).

Finally, the Spirit of the Knowledge of God and the Fear of God includes an understanding of the will of God, and a sense of holy reverence and respect toward God. The Christian counselor, like any believer, has the divine revelation of Scripture available, along with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to access the knowledge of God. Further, a true fear of God leads to the seeking out of God's presence (Jones, 2006).

Relationship of psychology and counseling

Now that counseling and the care of souls has been established in its authentic foundation of theology, it is relevant to turn next to counseling's relationship with modern psychology. It has been established that counseling can be found in the beginning, with God engaging fallen human beings. Living in the twenty-first century, however, requires that counselors reject, embrace, or engage in some manner with the field of science.

Psychology is defined in many ways. For the purpose of this paper, it will be defined as "today's science of behavior and mental processes (John-



son, 2010).” It is the current position of this author, that our only foundation of truth is Scripture, and that God also has the power to reveal Himself through the careful, authentic practice of science, including some scientific forms of psychology. Given the limitations of humanity, Christian counselors are faced with choices to reject, fully embrace, or somehow interface with these disciplines. A number of views have been presented on the appropriate framework to address psychology and counseling (Johnson, 2010), and believers have the opportunity to review and critique carefully these methods of engagement.

In an explanation of the integration view, Stanton Jones writes,

Integration of Christianity and psychology (or any area of “secular thought”) is our living out—in this particular area—the lordship of Christ over all of existence by our giving His special revelation—God’s true Word—its appropriate place of authority in determining our fundamental beliefs about and practices toward all of reality and toward our academic subject matter in particular. (Johnson, 2010, p. 102)

This position also recognizes helpful attributes of the other significant models addressing psychology and counseling. The “Levels of Explanation” view of David Myers, which argues for learning from both “the book of God’s Word and the book of God’s works” (faith and science) (Johnson, 2010, p. 50), for example, is a reminder to the integrationist of the allowance for common grace.

The “Christian Psychology” model, as outlined by Roberts and Watson, highlights the helpful tool of carefully considering the longstanding tradition of counseling, and also calling for good, empirical research (Johnson, 2010). The “Transformational Psychology” model provides an essential piece of the counseling process, in the person of the counselor. This view, as outlined by Coe and Hall, is a reminder that the person doing counseling has

a sacred and transformational role to play in this arena (Johnson, 2010). Finally, the “Biblical Counseling” model, as outlined by Powlison, is an excellent reminder of holding first to God’s Word, before carefully critiquing any secondary human pursuit of truth, be it science, experience or otherwise (Johnson, 2010).

In conclusion, the wise Christian counselor will first humbly recognize his or her limitations, seek God and the Holy Spirit, and will grapple with how to glorify God in the sacred calling of soul care. This calling is a spiritual discipline and an act of worship, redemption and sanctification, both for the counselor and the counselee. The counselor recognizes that the counseling process is a meaningful, relational, time-bound, goal-oriented and Spirit-lead process of being a vessel in the Lord’s pursuit of the hearts, souls and minds of His creation.

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DEALING WITH TRAGEDY IN THE CHURCH

by Ian F. Jones, Ph.D., Ph.D

Recent history has demonstrated that Christian counselors should be prepared for traumatic events in the local church. Such preparation includes studying examples of trauma and responses in Scripture, avoiding preconceived interventions that ignore the unique personal condition and situation of the individual, developing a biblical view of suffering, and taking care of personal health when ministering in such situations.

It has happened again. Two days after I presented a workshop on Crisis Responders and Christian Counseling, where I addressed dealing with shootings and tragedy in the local church, at the 2017 annual New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Christian Counseling Conference, we were all confronted with the news of the shootings at Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church in Texas on November 5, 2017 that left 26 people dead. Hardly a year goes by when we do not hear of violence and death in local churches. On Sunday, August 12, 2007, a gunman killed three people at the First Congregational Church in Neosho, Missouri; on Sunday, December 9, 2007, a gunman killed two people at the New Life Church in Colorado Springs; on Sunday, July 27, 2008, a gunman killed two people at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee; on Sunday, November 23, 2008, a gunman killed two people at the St. Thomas Syrian Orthodox Knanaya Church in Clifton, New

Jersey; and on Sunday, March 8, 2009, a gunman killed the pastor at First Baptist Church, Maryville, Illinois. In 2010, there were church shootings at New Gethsemane Church of God in Christ in Richmond, California, and at Walnut Park Casa De Mi Gloria Church in Garland, Texas. In 2011, there was a church shooting at Greater Faith Christian Center Church in Lakeland, Florida. On June 17, 2015, a gunman murdered nine people at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and on Sunday, September 24, 2017, a gunman killed one person at Burnette Chapel Church of Christ in Antioch, Tennessee. I have identified some, but not all of the incidences of violence in local churches over the last decade. In many cases, in addition to the people who were killed, there were many people who were wounded and many people left suffering, sometimes for years, in the aftermath of these tragedies. As Christian counselors we need to be prepared for such events.

My personal experience with a church shooting occurred on September 15, 1999 at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, where a gunman entered the church sanctuary on that Wednesday evening during a church concert and killed seven people, before taking his own life. I, along with a number of my colleagues, was at the church site that night following the shooting, and we were actively engaged in ministry and counseling in the days and months that followed.

The Bible provides numerous examples of grief, trauma, loss, and death that give us direction and insight into providing compassionate ministry. We find Joseph being sold into slavery; Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, Hannah, Elizabeth having difficulty conceiving children; Job losing his property, children, and health; Naomi and Ruth both losing their husbands; Jeremiah lamenting over the sins of Israel; Jesus responding to the death (murder) of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:18); Mary and Martha mourning the death of their brother Lazarus, and the emotion of Jesus at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). Full preparation for such events is not always possible, but counselors should avoid the attitude that “It can’t happen here.” In addition, counselors need to be aware of the following:

- **Do not expect everyone to respond to tragedies in the same way.** A variety of responses can be found surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus: confusion (Matt. 26:56), fear and denial (Matt. 26:69-75), suicide (Matt. 27:1-5), anguish and mourning (Luke 23:27, 48), mockery and condemnation (Matt. 27:27-30; Luke 23:35-37), anger and confrontation (Matt. 27:39-43; Luke 23:39), repentance (Luke 23:40-43), intense theological discussion of events (Luke 24:13-33), hiding and uncertainty (John 20:19), practical responses (Matt. 27:57-60; John 19:38-42), additional or secondary trauma (John 20:11-14), lack of concern (John 19:23-24), morbid satisfaction (John 19:7-16), and escape and attempts to return to the familiar (Mark 14:50-52; John 21:3) (Jones, 2006). Counselors should adjust their counsel to the particular concerns and conditions of the individual, just as Jesus did in his post-resurrection appearances. For example, Mary (who wanted to know what had become of the body—Jesus showed her the body!), doubting Thomas (who would not believe until he had seen and touched—Jesus insisted that Thomas touch his body), and the couple on the road to Emmaus (who could not reconcile the crucifixion with the concept of Messiah—Jesus explained, using all the references in Scripture). Do not attempt to give a theological lesson when the person simply needs assurance and a comforting presence.
- **Major trauma and loss require intentional engagement and awareness.** From our experiences in the Wedgwood Baptist Church shootings, we learned that people grieve in different ways and at various paces, and that we should not force people to fit into a preconceived pattern. Some people appear to have no apparent difficulties at first, but will later struggle, some people have a rapid resolution or take it in stride, and others will have an ongoing struggle. I recall talking to one young person several years later who witnessed the shooting tragedy, and she spoke of the numbness and the fact that, although her parents tried hard



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to help her, there was nothing that they could say or do at the time except to give her space and convey their love. Some people may shut down emotionally, struggle with guilt and an awareness of their own mortality, react to certain sounds or particular places that trigger memories, have difficulties eating or sleeping, or act out and engage in risky behavior.

- **Try to normalize the emotions and physical responses.** Emotions are to be expected in light of the tragedy. Assure people that there is no one proper way to grieve in terms of time, intensity, and expression. Assure them of God's love and abiding presence and your prayers. Lead them to an assurance that God is in control—even while Jesus was dying on the cross. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6). Suggest that they write down their thoughts and experiences, if it helps, and seek additional counseling.
- **Practice being a comforting presence.** Model the compassion and comfort of Christ:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (2 Cor. 1:3-7 NIV)
- **Develop a solid biblical theology of suffering and hope.** Seek spiritual purpose and spiritual growth.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ...we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Rom. 8:18-27, NIV)
- **Do not neglect your own spiritual and mental health during such times.** Compassion fatigue and burn out can occur if you fail to recognize your own physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual limitations and the negative effects of traumatic events upon caregivers.

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