



consider



—
ADDRESSING TEN
MISTAKES
IN OUR BIBLICAL
COUNSELING
—

your



counsel



—
BOB
KELLEMEIN
—

“*Consider Your Counsel* sheds fresh light on the value and benefit of humble evaluation and continued sharpening. I highly commend Bob’s book to the newest and most seasoned counselors alike and encourage you to join me in revisiting it often.”

Eliza Huie, Author of *Raising Kids in a Screen-Saturated World*

“Throughout this book, Bob’s heart for others shines through. Never the stern or austere judge, he serves as a loving and patient guide. This brief book should be required for all counselors, new and old alike.”

Jonathan D. Holmes, Executive Director, Fieldstone Counseling;
Pastor of Counseling, Parkside Church

“Bob Kellemen reminds us that using the Bible alone is not biblical counseling. We must care about *how* we use the Bible and *how* we relate to counselees. Both novice and seasoned biblical counselors can appreciate the balanced insights in this book as we consider our counsel for the glory of God.”

Lilly Park, Associate Professor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“When I read books on counseling, I measure them by the chapters that speak to my need to be a better counselor. *Consider Your Counsel* by Bob Kellemen helps me in all ten chapters. There is so much good in this book for anyone who wants to be better at helping others!”

Charles D. Hodges Jr., Practicing Family Physician in Indianapolis, Indiana; executive director, Vision of Hope, Lafayette, Indiana

“Bob Kellemen’s work in *Consider Your Counsel* is profoundly scriptural and transformative. It is an essential guidebook for the new and seasoned biblical counselor.”

Shannon Kay McCoy, ACBC; biblical counseling director, Valley Center Community Church; council member, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Supported with Scripture while also offering wisdom from historical examples of faithful soul care, this is a book I want to get into the hands of my students as they move from the theory to the practice of biblical counseling.”

Jim Newheiser, Director of the Christian Counseling Program, RTS Charlotte; executive director IBCC; author of *Money, Debt, and Finances*

“Prevention and correction. These are two marvelous benefits that come from reading *Consider Your Counsel*. The biblical counseling movement will be well served by this excellent resource for generations to come.”

C. W. Solomon, Executive Director, The Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Any counselor, no matter how much experience they have, will be edified with the reading of Bob’s perception of common mistakes in counseling. Please read it, consider it, and grow in personal holiness and ministry faithfulness.”

Alexandre “Sacha” Mendes, Pastor; board of directors of the Biblical Counseling Coalition; director at ABCB (Brazilian Association of Biblical Counseling)

“*Consider Your Counsel* is comprehensive in that it highlights different pitfalls to avoid, provides helpful self-assessments, and provides necessary advice for correction if needed. It is also succinct and extremely valuable to both the novice and seasoned counselor. I am excited to add it to the required readings list for my team of counselors.”

Ben Marshall, Pastor of Counseling, Canyon Hills Community Church, Bothel, Washington; ACBC and IABC certified biblical counselor

“Bob Kellemen is a counselor of counselors, and this book is his equipping workshop. More than a list of common mistakes, this is a foundational philosophy of counseling in an accessible and concise form. If it is said so often that it has become cliché, the saying is true in this case: this is a book all counselors need to read!”

David R. Dunham, Pastor of Counseling & Discipleship, Cornerstone Baptist Church

“In *Consider Your Counsel*, Dr. Kellemen continues his consistent emphasis on Christlike, incarnational, personal ministry. This work on compassionate soul care ministry is a stimulating challenge to veteran counselors as well as needed training for new biblical counselors.”

Brent Aucoin, Pastor of Seminary and Soul Care Ministry, Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana

“*Consider Your Counsel* is a gift to the church by casting a vision for compassionate, comprehensive, and communal care that reflects the God of all comfort and our Good Shepherd. This work will benefit every church leader and member as we seek to bear one another’s burdens.”

Robert K. Cheong, Pastor of Care, Sojourn Church Midtown; executive director, Gospel Care Ministries

CONSIDER YOUR COUNSEL

ADDRESSING TEN MISTAKES IN
OUR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Bob Kellemen



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AS YOU'LL read in the introduction, *Consider Your Counsel* was birthed by a question asked by biblical counseling students I supervise. So, it seems only fitting that I dedicate this book to an array of students I've supervised over the past thirty-plus years. Though I can't name you because I would never have the space, you know who you are. Thank you each for your commitment to learning and growing as biblical counselors. Your humble openness to feedback, your deep desire to mature as a counselor, and your loving passion for ministering God's Word to God's people are so encouraging to me.

In a similar spirit, I'd also like to dedicate *Consider Your Counsel* to you—my readers. You wouldn't be reading this book unless you shared that same desire to keep maturing as a biblical counselor. I pray that the reading and applying of this book will stretch and strengthen you just as the writing of it has done for me.

And I surely want to thank the team at New Growth Press. I've been privileged to work with a lot of publishers. Working with New Growth Press is more than working with a publisher—it's working with friends who care about their work, about my writing, and about me. Thank you Barbara, Ruth, Irene, Cheryl, Karen, Mark, and the rest of the team—the rest of the “family.”

INTRODUCTION

A WORD FROM BOB

THIS BOOK began when several biblical counseling students who had been under my supervision asked my thoughts on common themes, threads, and patterns I detected as a counseling supervisor. They were specific: “We’re not asking about all the ‘good stuff’ we do as biblical counselors. We’re interested in the consistent areas where you sense a need for growth.” Because it’s a passion of mine to encourage biblical counselors who are looking for ways to grow, their question intrigued me. And, since I’m a collator of patterns, their request sent me back to my supervisory notes—resulting in this book.

ENCOURAGEMENT, NOT CRITIQUE

My only hesitation in collating these ten mistakes into book form is that I do *not* want to foster a negative perception of the modern biblical counseling movement. I’m a big fan of biblical counseling and biblical counselors. *I’m* a biblical counselor. I’ve invested over thirty years into providing biblical counseling, equipping biblical counselors, and supervising biblical counselors. It was one of the greatest joys of my ministry life to be the founding executive director of the Biblical Counseling Coalition. The vast majority of the content I’ve written in more than 2,500 blog posts, more than 150 published articles, and more than twenty books and booklets focuses on a positive presentation of biblical counseling and Christian living.

That said, there's something healthy and humble about a movement self-assessing, self-critiquing, and self-correcting—biblically, wisely, collaboratively, and graciously. Indeed, the modern biblical counseling movement was launched with the concept of confronting out of concern for change. And biblical counseling is well known for self-counsel and self-confrontation. So it would be unusual for us as biblical counselors not to consider our counseling individually and collaboratively.

Rather than focusing on critique, this book highlights tendencies I've noticed in the thousands of biblical counselors I've trained and the hundreds of biblical counselors I've supervised over the past thirty years. These include laypeople in four churches, pastors, counselors, Bible college students, and seminary students in over a dozen schools (as a professor and as an adjunct/visiting professor). My supervisees also include experienced counselors and mature pastors who have requested additional counseling supervision. I poured over my supervision notes asking, *What patterns, themes, and threads of blind spots do I detect in rookie and veteran biblical counselors—myself included—from which we could learn and grow?*

Although I've been providing biblical counseling for thirty-five years, I have made these mistakes. Even “seasoned” biblical counselors can benefit from a course correction. We are wise to regularly self-assess and to have others speak into our practice of biblical counseling. My heart behind sharing these ten observations is to encourage all of us to continue to deepen and develop as biblical counselors. Biblical counselors are well known for emphasizing progressive sanctification—ongoing growth in Christ. We can think of this book as part of that iron-sharpening-iron process of progressively growing together as biblical counselors.

DRAWING POSITIVES OUT OF NEGATIVES

When I supervise counselors, I spend a good deal of time affirming the positives I see. For instance, “That was great how you interacted there. Keep doing more of that!” or “Wow! That was

amazing how you connected Scripture to life there. What biblical insights led you to pursue that helpful direction?”

Even if I detect weaknesses or “mistakes,” my aim in discussing them is to help counselors-in-training to mature. For instance, “Your interaction there seems a tad off track in this specific way. . . . Let’s talk about what might have been going on there. What way of thinking about counseling might have led to that interaction? And let’s ponder what you—and I—could learn from this.”

That’s the plan in addressing these ten common counseling mistakes—growing together. You’ll note that I’ll spend less time highlighting the mistake and most of my time devoted to describing a biblical alternative and what a more biblical approach might look like. Think of this book as *supervision by writing*. My chief desire in crafting this material is that it would be an encouraging refresher tool for us as biblical counselors.

A final word before we start addressing these common mistakes: this list does not attempt to say everything that could be said about the essence of helpful biblical counseling. For more on biblical counseling theology, see *Gospel-Centered Counseling*.¹ For more on biblical counseling methodology, see *Gospel Conversations*.²

Let’s begin learning together—from our mistakes. Let’s keep learning and growing into more mature biblical counselors who speak and live God’s truth in love.

MISTAKE #1:

WE ELEVATE DATA COLLECTION ABOVE SOUL CONNECTION

THE MODERN biblical counseling movement does a fine job at data collection. We've been accurately taught to heed biblical wisdom about listening before speaking, such as, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13). "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19).

We wisely use our Personal Information Forms to collect pages of information and reams of data about our counselee. We learn important information about their unique situation, their family background, the suffering they have endured, the besetting sin they are battling, their relationship to Christ, and so much more. All of this is very good, healthy, helpful, and wise. Let's continue to collect data.

SOUL CONNECTION IS THEOLOGICAL

And yet . . . people are not car engines we fix by reading a mechanic's manual. People are not computers we treat by reading the operator's guide.

People are image bearers of our relational God who exists in eternal, Triune community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26–28). The Word was and is eternally with God in intimate face-to-face communion (John 1:1–18). Adam—while in perfect communion in a perfect garden with a perfect God—still

was alone and needing the companionship of Eve (Genesis 2:18). We are relational.

Soul connection in counseling is theological because God designed us to relate intimately to him and to one another. Counseling that stops at data collection is *not biblical* counseling.

Data collection without soul connection can end up treating image bearers like lab specimens to be analyzed and dissected. It can become aloof, impersonal, and uncaring—and even un-Christlike.

SOUL CONNECTION IS BIBLICAL: PAUL MODELS IT CONSISTENTLY

So what are we to do instead of impersonal data collection? We are to pursue personal connection. Sometimes this means stopping in the middle of collecting background information and praying because you can tell the person is overwhelmed by what they're sharing. Other times it means weeping with counselees as they weep. Primarily it emphasizes relational involvement where you enter the unique soul and the personal story of your counselee—human being to human being.

During supervision I've observed the opposite of this many times. A counselee moves from intellectually sharing information to emotionally breaking down. The counselor then either continues to ask factual questions or begins teaching. As the supervisor, I'll interject myself into the live counseling to encourage the counselor to put down their pen and notes, stop teaching, and *be relationally present with their counselee in that moment*.

This is what Paul did in his ministry with people—with relational image bearers. Ponder just a few examples from Paul's relational ministry.

- *Paul models sharing Scripture and soul.*

“So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also

our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

- *Paul models the compassionate care of personal ministry.*

“My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19).

- *Paul models the family and relational nature of personal ministry.*

“But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. . . . For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11–12).

- *Paul models the passion and closeness of personal ministry.*

“For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you” (Colossians 1:29–2:1).

- *Paul models heart and soul relationship in the personal ministry of the Word.*

“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also” (2 Corinthians 6:11–13 NIV).

SOUL CONNECTION IS HISTORICAL: CHURCH HISTORY MODELS IT CONSISTENTLY

Octavia Albert knew something about suffering and about comforting others in their suffering. Albert was a formerly enslaved, college-educated African-American pastor’s wife living in Louisiana. In the 1870s, she ministered to many formerly enslaved men

and women by recording their stories of suffering. One of those individuals was Charlotte Brooks. Of Brooks, Albert writes, “It was in the fall of 1879 that I met Charlotte Brooks. . . . I have *spent hours with her listening to her telling of her sad life of bondage in the cane-fields of Louisiana*” (emphasis added).¹

We would be miles ahead in our biblical counseling if we would follow Albert’s model of *spending hours listening to sad stories*. Rather than simply collecting data, we enter the situation and soul of another person as we listen compassionately to their story.

As we listen to our counselees’ earthly stories, we need to empathize with them in their story. Empathy is not some secular Trojan horse that seeks to sneak extra-biblical concepts into our biblical counseling. Empathy is a biblical word and a scriptural concept. Think of the word *em-pathos*—to enter the pathos or the passion of another, to allow another person’s agony to become our agony, to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Notice how Octavia Albert allowed Charlotte Brooks’s agony to become her own. “Poor Charlotte Brooks! I can never forget how her eyes were filled with tears when she would speak of all her children: “Gone, and no one to care for me!”²

Like Octavia Albert, as we listen and collect data, we connect soul to soul, human being to human being, image bearer to image bearer, sufferer to sufferer. Not only must we feel what another person feels, we need to express and communicate that we “get it,” we feel it, we hurt too. Consider how Octavia Albert does this with Aunt Charlotte. “Aunt Charlotte, my heart throbs with sympathy, and my eyes are filled with tears, whenever I hear you tell of the trials of yourself and others.”³

What Brooks modeled in 1879, the church has long called “compassionate commiseration.” *Co-passion*: to share the passionate feelings of another. *Co-misery*: to partner in the misery of our friend.

SOUL CONNECTION IS SCRIPTURAL: GOD COMMANDS IT OF US

Paul commands every member of the body of Christ to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). We are to embody truth in

the context of a sacrificial, intimate, caring, and connected relationship. Our words of truth and challenge to our counselees can only be received and trusted as a foundation of genuine love and care is being established.

The Holy Spirit sovereignly combined the members of the body of Christ so “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:25–26).

Paul prays for us that our “love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9). The heartbeat of Scripture always beats to the rhythm of *truth and love*, *Scripture and soul*, and *wisdom and relationship*. As biblical counselors, we seek to be Christlike counselors—full of *both* grace and truth. We grow in this relational competency as we wisely and carefully combine comprehensive data collection with compassionate soul connection.

SUPERVISION TAKEAWAYS

With counselees, after a long and intense session I’ll often say, “We talked about a lot of important matters today. Of everything we shared, let’s each take a minute or two to jot down a couple of major takeaways.” These often end up becoming our collaboratively created “homework” assignments for that counselee. Though this book is like supervision in writing, you and I can’t cocreate supervision homework assignments. However, I would encourage you to ponder after each chapter what the biggest takeaways are for you as a biblical counselor. I’ll seek to do the same at the end of each chapter by collating four counselor self-assessment questions. Here’s our first set of questions:

ASSESSING OUR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

1. In our biblical counseling, would people say of us, “I feel like a soul to be heard, known, understood, and cared

- about”? Or, would they say of us, “I feel like a specimen to be probed, dissected, examined, and diagnosed”?
2. In our biblical counseling, would people say of us, “She loves me like a tender, gentle mother. He loves me like an encouraging, comforting father”?
 3. Would the people we counsel say of us, “They share Scripture and soul. They model intimacy and intensity. They relate like a family and a community”?
 4. In our biblical counseling, how richly and compassionately are we empathizing with the situation and soul of our brothers and sisters in Christ?