

# BIBLICAL COUNSELLING

A Short Course

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HILLCREST  
BAPTIST CHURCH

Where Truth Matters

## Foreword

This booklet summarises a short course on biblical counselling presented at Hillcrest Baptist Church. It contains an outline only of the process and some of the essential elements of biblical counselling. Limited case studies are provided to help illustrate the process. These case studies apply the process to real life situations, and also introduce more information specific to each case study. The insights in this course have come from a variety of authors and teachers, including Jay Adams, Larry Crabb and Joel James. A list of recommended books and authors can be found at the end of this booklet.

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## Session One: Fundamental principles of counselling

### 1.1 Why do we have emotional and physical difficulties in our lives that require counselling?

We must approach the subject of counselling from a biblical worldview, and always bring Scripture to bear on any topic. We experience pain and suffering from two main sources.

Firstly, we have a sinful nature that is opposed to God and holiness (Rom. 8:7; Gal. 5:19-21). This sinful nature causes us to think and act in sinful ways, which brings negative consequences.

Secondly, the earth and everything in it is cursed by sin. We therefore experience pain and difficulties from external sources, such as other people's sinful actions and natural disasters that impact on our lives and cause us distress. Our physical bodies are also subject to disease and decay.

The above two sources obviously impact each other. For example, as we experience pain and suffering from trials or difficulties, we can respond to them in sinful ways, which leads to further negative consequences.

This means that secular psychology, which does not have a biblical worldview, nor acknowledges the massive impact that sin has had on us and our environment, can never bring lasting comfort and help.

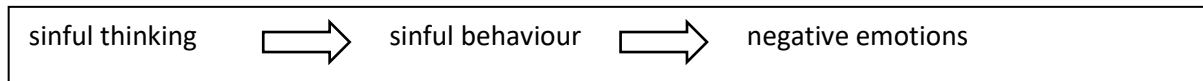
[Note that due to this curse of sin, we are also subject to "organic illnesses" such as mental disorders. This course is not designed to deal with these in the first instance.]

### 1.2 Our single greatest need

The Bible indicates that our single greatest need is to be reconciled to God. We will never find true joy and peace in our lives until this happens. This means that one of the first things we need to establish in counselling is whether the person is a true Christian or not. If they are not, one of the first tasks is to use the gospel to show people their need for forgiveness from sin and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. Even when counselling believers, they have often not applied the gospel to their various situations. Hence the gospel often plays a major role in counselling, whether dealing with unbelievers or believers.

### 1.3 How do we function emotionally as people created in God's image?

God has made us to be rational beings, with minds, emotions and a will to act. It is critical to understand that the Bible indicates the following general process:



This means that in biblical counselling we can never solely deal with emotions or even behaviours. We must get down to what people are thinking if we are going to help them have lasting change in their lives (Rom. 12:1-2). Counselling that is directed primarily towards feelings and emotions is doomed to failure. We cannot necessarily change our feelings at will. It is only as our thinking is renewed and leads to changed behaviour, that our feelings can effectively be changed. The focus of counselling is therefore godly thinking leading to godly behaviour. The feelings should then follow.

### 1.4 How does biblical change take place?

Biblical change always starts with repentance and confession of sin. Repentance actually means a change of mind about something. From a biblical point of view, repentance means having a change of mind about God, ourselves and this world. Repentance includes receiving and accepting God's truths and perspectives in Scripture, and forsaking our own ideas and views.

The following process is important for change:

Promote right thinking through teaching (repentance and a renewed mind [Rom 12:1-2])



Plan right behaviour (put off old, sinful behaviour and put on godly behaviour [Eph. 4:22-24])



Enjoy healthy feelings (joy, peace, contentment)

## 1.5 Summary: The biblical process of counselling for change

Identify sinful or negative feelings



Identify sinful or negative behaviour  
(if counseling stops here, then there will be no lasting change)



Identify sinful or negative thinking



**Change thinking through teaching (renewing the mind)**



Plan right behavior (put off sin and put on godliness)



Identify satisfying feelings

## 1.6 Some preliminary questions:

### 1.6.1 How “technique-based” should counselling be?

In the context of the Christian church, counselling is essentially about caring for others. It includes finding out how people are doing, what they are battling with and helping them apply Scripture to their lives. The process described in this booklet should therefore not be seen as a rigid “process” that needs to be followed mechanically.

In addition, the context of counselling can vary in the local church. It could be more formal where members in the church approach a pastor or elder and ask for help with a specific issue. These counselling sessions would tend to be slightly more formal. On the other hand, the processes and principles of biblical counselling can be used in an informal manner in a discipling context between believers in a church.

### 1.6.2 Why does the cover picture only have a bible?

The cover picture was chosen deliberately to convey the important point that pastors or more mature Christians who counsel others are never to be seen as “priests” or “gurus.” It is important to remember all believers are sinners before God, and the counsellor depends completely on God and the Holy Spirit to effect change in the person being counselled. All counselling needs to be based on Scripture.

This knowledge should always keep the counsellor humble and dependent on God.

### 1.6.3 Is Christian counselling completely and strictly confidential?

This is a very important question and can be the source of differences amongst Christians. In the context of a local church, it is important to note the following:

- (i) Elders are often part of an eldership team, and may need to ask the other elders for advice and wisdom on how to handle certain cases.
- (ii) The Lord Jesus has specified how serious sin ought to be dealt with in a local church (Matt. 18:15-17). This means that if certain sins are uncovered in counselling, and the person being counselled is a member of the local church and remains unrepentant, the matter may at the end of the day be brought to the entire church for discipline. This does not mean that all the details of the sin need to be revealed, but that the substance of the matter may need to be relayed to the church. The view that all counselling in the church is strictly confidential, cannot be used to negate the Lordship of Christ on issues like church discipline.

The above two eventualities need to be made known with a counselee when counselling starts.



Apart from the above considerations, all counselling should be treated as confidential. Counsellors need to be discreet and trustworthy. It is extremely damaging to Christians if they discover that their issues have been discussed or “leaked” to others.

## Session Two: The mood of counselling

### 2.1 The importance of creating the correct mood for counselling

Why is the mood so important? A person who needs help could be feeling:

- Vulnerable
- Guilty and ashamed
- Confused

For people to be able to open up and honestly expose what is happening in their hearts and minds, they need a secure and safe environment. Just put yourself in the shoes of someone needing counselling. What type of mood would help you be able to share some of your deepest burdens?

### 2.2 The shepherd's heart

The following characteristics are essential for a counsellor:

- Love
- Empathy
- Concern
- Warmth
- Gentleness
- Trustworthiness (not to betray confidences)
- Approachability
- Authenticity
- Humility

The above list includes some of the required characteristics for elders, who are essentially shepherds and counsellors. They cannot take care of people's souls without these characteristics.

### 2.3 Watch out for these negative attitudes in yourself

The following attitudes / behaviours will limit any counselling endeavours:

- Harshness
- Judgementalism (as opposed to making judgements of right and wrong based on Scripture)
- Sarcasm
- A critical spirit
- Indifference
- Frustration when change is slow

If people leave the counselling session feeling scolded for their foolishness, then something has gone wrong.

## 2.4 Don't fall into these two traps

The above sections emphasise a gentleness and an empathy towards people in need. In our endeavours to help others, however, when empathy is stirred up, there is a temptation to:

- Excuse people's sin or make sin seem less serious than it actually is in God's sight.
- Replace one sin with a "lesser" sin to make the process of repentance and change less painful and difficult for the counselee.

The above traps need to be avoided if the counselee is to experience true change leading to healing.

## Session three: The tools and resources for counselling

### 3.1 The Scriptures

The Scriptures are inspired, and completely sufficient for the task of changing lives.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16 & 17)*

The whole Bible is to be brought to bear on the person during the task of counselling, but generally speaking:

- The Promises give hope, which is essential in counselling.
- The Law exposes sin.
- The Proverbs give wisdom for living that pleases God.
- The Epistles give teaching to renew minds and change attitudes.

It is therefore critical for the counsellor to know the Bible. The more skilled you are in the Word, the more effective you will be as a godly counsellor.

### 3.2 The Holy Spirit

At the end of the day, as counsellors, we cannot change people – only God can. The Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures to change lives.

- The Holy Spirit gives the new birth to change people's hearts and open their minds. This new birth sets people free from slavery to sin, so that change is possible (Rom. 6:6).
- The fruit of the Spirit is essential for a sanctified, joyful life (Gal. 5:22).
- It is by the Spirit that we put sin to death (Rom. 8:13). The Spirit gives us power to overcome sinful habits.

Both the counsellor and the counselee must always be aware of their dependence on the Holy Spirit.

### 3.3 Prayer

Prayer is related closely to the above point. In prayer we acknowledge our own limitations and dependence on God. As counsellors, we need to be praying for ourselves, the counselling sessions, and especially the people we are counselling.

Due to the fact that counselling is invariably dealing with sin, it is a spiritual battle. As such, prayer is crucial (Eph. 6:17-18).

### 3.4 Your own experiences, personality and heart issues

As we experience trials, difficulties and encounter the corruptions of our own hearts, we learn valuable lessons about life. We learn how to trust in God, how to renew our own thinking and how to put on godly behaviour. God uses our own experiences to help others. Note how David counselled his own heart (Ps. 42:5).

We need to remember that God wants to use us (which includes all our life experiences) to help others. So God often puts us through circumstances so that we are better equipped to help others (see 2 Cor. 1:4).

In addition, previous counselling experiences can greatly assist in giving us proven wisdom on how to handle certain people and certain issues.

### 3.5 Careful listening

The more carefully we listen to others, and seek to understand them, the better counsellors we will be. The wisdom of the Bible certainly promotes active listening as an important virtue (Jam. 1:19).

### 3.6 Confidence in Scripture, God and prayer

Many counselees are looking for hope. They therefore need to see that the counsellor possesses the virtues of trust and confidence in God, His word and prayer. The Bible teaches that our faith can stir others up to similar faith and encourage them. This is the whole point of Hebrews 11.

As counsellors, we therefore need to have a steady confidence in God, and optimism in counselling others. Change is indeed possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, and at times this change can be rapid. God is certainly desiring that His children grow in godliness. God does provide a way out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), which means there will be solutions and direction for those in trouble as His grace is sufficient for us in all trials (2 Cor. 12:9). As mentioned before, Scripture is completely sufficient for living a life that is pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:16), meaning that there will never be a counselling situation where the Bible has no answer for the person being counselled.

All these factors must give us confidence in the endeavour of counselling.

## Session four: The “how to” of counselling

The aim of Christian counselling is to draw alongside someone, understand their problems, and help apply the Bible to their lives. It is essentially a caring ministry, and counselling should not get too mechanical in applying a “technique” so that a personal touch and empathy is lost. However, there is definitely a general process to follow when counselling.

The following guidelines have been adapted from a talk by Joel James on Biblical Counselling, and are generally sequential.

### 4.1 Getting to know the person being counselled

Ask questions about:

- (i) The home they grew up in (mother, father, siblings, divorce, abuse etc?)
- (ii) Their spiritual life – are they converted? How did this come about? Can they articulate the gospel?
- (iii) How often do they go to church, read their Bibles and pray?
- (iv) What work do they do?
- (v) Do they have many friends? Are their friends believers or unbelievers?
- (vi) Their current situation: married? Divorced? Children?

Appendix A contains some templates that can be used to collect some of this information.

### 4.2 Identifying the main problem(s)

You are looking for ordinary sins and patterns of sins in their lives. Ask a number of questions:

- (i) What do you believe your problem is? How do you see it?
- (ii) What have you done about your problem until now?
- (iii) How do you believe I can help you?

Note that orderly questioning is part of the solution, as it sifts through the confusion and chaos that the counselee may be thinking and feeling.

You are wanting to get specific information from the counselee. When people are allowed to generalise, they often exaggerate someone else’s sin and minimise their own. Ask questions like:

- (i) What exactly did you do?
- (ii) When did you do it? How often?
- (iii) Where did you do it?
- (iv) Who was there?

Also ask “what” or “why” questions to bring out feelings and thinking. For example:

- (i) What were you feeling and thinking?
- (ii) What did you want?
- (iii) What you did – did it help?

All this information needs to be organised to be able to analyse it and identify the problems and sins. Here, it is important to:

- (i) Move the counselee from a victim mentality to enable them to see their responsibility before God.
- (ii) Not allow the counselee to justify any sinful responses they may have had to other people’s sin.

#### 4.3 Label each problem with the correct biblical name

We can become intimidated when people use fancy labels for some of their behaviours. For example, if someone says their problem is “co-dependency,” we may wonder how we can use the Bible to address this, as the word “co-dependency” is not used in the Bible, and it sounds like a modern problem that the Bible does not address. However, if it is labelled correctly in line with Scripture (called the “fear of man”), then a simple look through a concordance will show that the Bible has plenty to say about the subject, and gives many solutions.

It is therefore important for the counsellor to:

- (i) Read the lists of sins in the Bible and understand each one of them (see Mk. 7:21-23; Rom. 1:28-32; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11 etc). Use these lists to label the counselee’s sins.
- (ii) Select the verses you want to use to address these sins – especially verses that propose solutions.

#### 4.4 Give the Bible’s interpretation of the problem

This step is critical in counselling, and is at the heart of finding biblical solutions for problems. This means that the counsellor must have a good understanding and insight into the length and breadth of Scripture.

#### 4.5 Identify and articulate the biblical solution clearly

Ephesians 4:22-24, as shown earlier, is at the heart of biblical change.

- (i) Identify the behaviour that needs to be put off.
- (ii) Identify the thinking that needs to change.
- (iii) Change the thinking through teaching from the Bible.
- (iv) Identify the new behaviour that must be put on.

Obviously, it is important to use relevant scriptures that speak to the issues at hand. During this process, sinful behaviour does need to be gently confronted, and the underlying thinking uncovered, with the aim of bringing about biblical repentance. It should be noted that this step in the process is at the core of change. It involves heart repentance and acknowledgement of sin by the counselee. This can take time and effort.

#### 4.6 Assigning homework

Homework can be important, for the following reasons:

- (i) It demonstrates the person's commitment to change.
- (ii) It reduces the dependency on you, the counsellor.



## Session five: Dealing with resentment, guilt and anxiety

Why is an entire session devoted to the topics of resentment, guilt and anxiety? Larry Crabb says that resentment, guilt and anxiety are foundational heart issues that underlie almost all problems people experience. It is critical therefore, that a counsellor looks out for these issues, and deals with them in a biblical manner.

### 5.1 Helping the counselee deal with resentment

Resentment arises when we feel we deserve something better than what God has given us or the way people treat us. This can then also lead to a lack of forgiveness towards others for their treatment of us.

In terms of the counselling process applied to resentment, the following is relevant:

Identify negative feelings: these can include anger, irritation, bitterness, revenge and resentment

Identify sinful behaviours: these can include lack of forgiveness, refusal to meet or interact with someone and abusive language.

Sinful thinking behind some of the behaviours:

- I am justified in my responses.
- I don't deserve to be treated in this way.
- Why did God allow this to happen? Why did He not protect me?

The world may excuse some of the above behaviours, prescribe medication, or even propose strategies such as punching bags! However, the biblical ways to think about resentment are as follows:

- (i) It is a sin to be repented of.
- (ii) It arises from not fully realising our own sinfulness and appreciating how much we have been forgiven (Matt. 18:21ff). We deserve nothing from God except anger and judgement. Anything good we receive is more than we deserve.
- (iii) It arises from a lack of understanding of God's control and purposes in our lives. Consider the life of Joseph. He could let go of resentment towards his brothers when he realised that God had orchestrated the events in his life (although his brothers were responsible for their actions) to bring about good and save many lives (Gen. 50:20). In this regard, untaught Christians may need to be taught about God's providence and sovereignty.
- (iv) Gratitude for all God's undeserved mercies is a cure for resentment.

Homework that can be given to someone dealing with resentment:

- Draw up a list of all your sins against God, and a list of the sins you believe this person has committed against you.
- Draw up a list of all God's mercies to you. How has He not treated you as your sins deserve?
- What possible good is God trying to teach you through the sins of others? What possible Christian graces is God trying to cultivate in you through the sins of others?

Godly behaviours to practice in dealing with resentment:

- Pray for the person you feel resentment towards.
- Find a few ways to actively bless and do good to those you feel resentment towards.
- Actively seek reconciliation – communicate with them, make them aware of their sin (if there is sin involved), and express willingness to forgive.

As these godly behaviours are pursued, the feelings of joy should follow.

## 5.2 Helping the counselee deal with guilt

Guilt arises from behaviours (thoughts, words or deeds) that break God's law.

Identify negative feelings: these can include shame, depression, and anxiety.

Identify negative behaviours: social withdrawal, struggling with work, loss of appetite etc.

Wrong thinking behind some of the ways people deal with guilt:

- I will never be able to find peace or forgiveness.
- I need to do something "good" to make up for the "bad" I have done.

The world has ways of dealing with guilt. These ways could include medication, or justifying / minimising the sinful behaviour that caused the guilt. Secular counsellors could suggest the following to the counselee:

- "Learn to forgive yourself"
- "Don't be so hard on yourself"
- "Everyone makes mistakes"

The only way to deal with guilt effectively, which includes biblical thinking and behaviour, is to:

- (i) Confess sin to God and accept the cleansing from the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:8-10).
- (ii) Confess sin to others if necessary (Jam. 5:16).
- (iii) Practise the principle of restoration if relevant (Lk. 19:8-10).
- (iv) Meditate regularly on the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse and renew us (Heb. 9:14).
- (v) Seek to walk in the light of God's word and in righteousness (1 Jn. 1:7).

### 5.3 Helping the counselee deal with anxiety

Anxiety essentially arises from a lack of trust in God and from failing to appreciate His Fatherly provision (Matt. 6:25-34). In most instances, people are anxious about things that have not happened yet.

The world commonly uses anti-depression and anti-anxiety medication to deal with anxiety. The biblical way to deal with anxiety is to:

- (i) Realise it is sin, as we are commanded to not be anxious (Philip. 4:6).
- (ii) Grow in faith in God by reading scripture, especially by meditating on the character, power, sovereignty and promises of God (Rom. 10:17). Low views of God produce anxious Christians.
- (iii) Focus on today, not on the worries of tomorrow (Matt. 6:34).
- (iv) Pray (Philip. 4:6-7).

Homework that would be important for the counselee to do could include:

- Find examples in the Bible of people God provided for when the situation seemed impossible.
- Find specific promises in the Bible that relate to God's provision.
- List everything God has provided for you for today.
- Make a list of any promise God has failed to fulfil (this will be a very short list!)

## Session six: Pit falls to avoid

### 6.1 How to handle a counselee who becomes dependent on you

Christians need counselling when they are struggling to cope spiritually by themselves. They are unable to, for a period of time, exercise faith and find solutions to their problems and so they need help. Scripture speaks about bearing each other's burdens. This means that for a time, when people are going through major difficulties, they are dependent on others. It is natural then, during a crisis, that a counselee relies on and looks to a counsellor for help. They cannot cope by themselves. Often, however, counsees become so dependent on the counsellor, that they feel they cannot live the Christian life without the constant support and direct help of the counsellor.

The aim of counselling is to help a Christian through a difficult time in their life, so that they can again cope by themselves and function in their lives and circumstances. They need to be brought to a place where they can by themselves, through the means of grace (scripture, prayer, fellowship and worship) live a life that glorifies Christ. In other words, counselling is a special, temporary measure to help another Christian through particular difficulties until they can function on their own again.

It is therefore important, during Christian counselling, to:

- (i) Assign homework so that the counselee can learn how to interpret and apply Scripture for themselves, to grow in faith, and to trust and depend on Christ for themselves.
- (ii) Teach the counselee, through the counselling sessions, how to approach spiritual problems, how to think biblically, and how to apply scripture to themselves.

### 6.2 How to handle long stories that go nowhere

Some people just love counselling sessions. It is an opportunity to unburden, and to enjoy the undivided attention of the counsellor. They can then talk, and talk, and talk!

As soon as you get this impression, you need to focus the discussion, interrupt, or ask questions to get back to the point.

### 6.3 How to handle not doing homework

Homework is very important as it is an opportunity to:

- (i) Check that the counselee is serious about changing, and not just enjoying the attention of the counsellor (see point above).
- (ii) Monitor that the counselee is learning the skills they need to cope by themselves.
- (iii) Gauge the growth and development of the counselee.

If a person is consistently not doing homework, it is time to stop the counselling until they are prepared to put in the effort themselves.

#### 6.4 Opposite sex counselling... AVOID!

Counselling results in spiritual and emotional intimacy between the counsellor and the counselee. It is best therefore to avoid counselling a member of the opposite sex alone. A husband and wife counselling team are therefore invaluable when circumstances dictate that a member of the opposite sex needs to be counselled. At the very least, opposite sex counselling should always be in the public eye – never alone in a room with a closed door.

#### 6.5 How to understand feeling guilty over “failure” in counselling

Due to differences in personality, gifting and experiences, some believers are better able to help a particular individual. It is therefore not a failure to send a counselee to someone else if progress is slow or non-existent.

In God’s mysterious providence, not all believers are able to grow greatly in their faith; some remain weak in faith (Rom. 14:1). Some believers also seem to struggle for long periods of time. There may be a time to stop counselling sessions after frequent attempts to help and after much prayer. There are no strict guidelines on when to do this.

#### 6.6 Unrealistic expectations and giving false hope

Biblical change can be hard (Jer. 13:23). It often includes:

- (i) Breaking sinful habits.
- (ii) Entrenching new, godly habits, which takes time.
- (iii) There may be failures and lapses.

Fighting sin and growing in grace in Scripture is called a “fight” (2 Tim. 4:7), “exercise” (1 Tim. 4:7) and “striving” (Heb. 12:4). All this means that growing in grace and becoming more Christ-like is a daily struggle. While it is important to give the counselee hope that change is possible through God’s strength, the counsellor should never give the impression that the Christian life is easy and sanctification is a smooth process.

## Case Study 1: Jim's depression

*Let me introduce you to Jim. You meet him at a workshop. He is a 50-year-old male. He looks a bit gaunt, tired and down. You get chatting. You ask if he is okay, and he unexpectedly says, "No, not really...". You agree to get together for a chat in the evening.*

*This case can be handled in the following way, as an example, but there could also be other approaches. This example follows the basic process outlined above in section 1.5.*

### Identifying feelings and behaviour

*It is useful to start with what someone is feeling, as this is most obvious to them. As you ask Jim to describe how he is feeling, it comes out that he is feeling overwhelmed with life and that he is no longer able to cope. These feelings can be explored to find if they are leading to any symptoms, such as loss of sleep, lack of energy during the day, exhaustion, loss of appetite and poor health.*

*You can conclude that Jim is most likely suffering from depression. With depression, it is important to explore if the depression is acute. Sadness or sorrow may arise from legitimate sources, such as bereavement or the presence of general difficulties from life in a sin-cursed world.*

*The difference between depression and sadness / sorrow is that depression is usually not linked to a specific, recent event such as bereavement, and so it tends to be a longer-term trend.*

*In this case, Jim indicates that there have been no instances of bereavement, and that his depression has been for a period of three years. There is no identifiable event that triggered the depression.*

*During the next stage of the counselling, the following possible sources of the depression need to be explored:*

- *Unrealised expectations (for a variety of issues)*
- *Guilt / shame / failure (an example is David in the Old Testament)*
- *Anxiety (from financial pressure, for example)*
- *Spiritual conflict (an example is Elijah versus the prophets of Baal)*
- *Physical trial / bad health*
- *Lack of assurance of salvation (this could be due to wrong doctrine, sin, or a trial)*

*As you probe these areas in Jim's life, he indicates that he is feeling anxious about his financial situation.*

*It would now be important to explore some of Jim's behaviours related to this anxiety, such as:*

- *Very long working hours*
- *Very little time with family*
- *Very little time to exercise*
- *Poor eating habits*
- *Not reading his Bible, praying or attending church*

### Identify wrong thinking

The next critical step in the counselling process is to identify Jim's thought processes in relation to his financial situation and his subsequent behaviour. The Bible indicates that behaviour is driven by thinking. This conflicts with the modern, secular worldview that at this stage Jim should be prescribed anti-depressants.

As you probe this aspect of Jim's life, he indicates that he is not presently in any significant financial difficulties. He is instead fearful of the future, and possible retrenchment in a few years' time. He has two children at school, whom he wants to put through university after school. Jim lives in a good house in a good area, owns two cars, and enjoys regular family holidays. Ultimately, he is fearful that he will lose his standard of living.

There are a number of critical areas to explore in terms of specific thoughts, ideas or presuppositions that may be driving Jim's anxiety and behaviour. These thoughts need to be assessed in terms of biblical standards and terminology:

- Greed: wanting to maintain financial standards at the expense of God and family
- Materialism: the idea that possessions and experiences will bring happiness
- Lack of contentment
- Storing up treasures on earth versus treasures in heaven
- Distrust of God for the future
- Love of money

The above bullets need to be assessed and evaluated, to see if any of them apply to Jim.

### Change thinking through teaching and promote right thinking

Jim's incorrect thinking and values now need to be corrected through the application of Scriptures. Scriptures abound regarding each of the sins in the bullet points above.

Scriptures also give perspectives on the correct way to think about work. For example:

- Believers are to work hard and be diligent without compromising other responsibilities towards God, which include family, spiritual life, serving others etc.
- The motivations for work are:
  - To provide for one's family
  - To be able to give to others
  - To be able to support ministries in God's kingdom

Jim needs to acknowledge that he is essentially distrusting God for future provision.

It is important in this phase of the process to ensure that repentance takes place. Repentance starts with a change of thinking. It must then move on to changed behaviour.

### Plan for right behaviour

*Jim now needs to be encouraged to adopt some of the following behaviours, which will indicate that true repentance has taken place.*

- *Regulating hours of work.*
- *Regularly attending church and renewing his relationship with God through prayer and reading Scripture.*
- *Agreeing with the family the regular time that needs to be spent together.*
- *Agreeing with the family those ministries that they will financially support in the church. Generosity and giving breaks the sin of greed in our lives.*
- *Agreeing on a programme of moderate physical activity and good eating habits.*

### Identify satisfying feelings

*As Jim starts to implement this change, he will start to enjoy the positive feelings that arise from a life that is aligned with God's will and standards.*



## Case Study 2: Jack's problem

*Jack's wife phones you and asks you to please talk to him. He is 45-year-old company executive. In years past, he used to be involved with family, enjoyed fishing and the gym, and performed well at work. He is now withdrawn from the family, has lost interest in exercise and fishing, and is failing to perform at work. He reluctantly agrees to meet with you.*

*Due to the fact that Jack was reluctant to meet, it can be expected that it will take some time to get to the source of the problem.*

### Identify the feelings or sinful behaviours

*You ask Jack what is going in his life, and if there are any specific problems that he is dealing with. Jack responds by saying that everything is fine, and there are no problems. You now need to realise that it is very likely that Jack is dealing with issues that he is ashamed of and trying to hide. You will now have to press him to get down to the main issues. You can tell him that his wife and colleagues are very concerned about him, as they have seen a deterioration— so something significant is wrong! If there is further reluctance, then move to specifics, saying things like:*

- *“Your wife has noticed you have stopped hobbies and exercise, and spending time with the family is almost non-existent. Why is that? What has changed?”*
- *“Work colleagues have noticed a substantial deterioration in your work performance. This is a serious situation. What has caused this?”*

*You can also read some Scriptures regarding the danger of covering sin (Prov. 28:13) and the healing that confession brings (1 Jn. 1:9; Jam. 5:16).*

*Jack continues to avoid the issues, and indicates there have been a few slips at work. He says he just needs some time to get back on track. Further probing is now required, so you continue by asking what Jack does with his spare time. He used to exercise and fish, so what does he do with this time now?*

*Jack indicates he spends some time doing “research” on the internet, or looking up things he is interested in. You can follow up by asking if he does this by himself, if he involves the family or even if he shares some of the information he is picking up from the internet. He indicates he does not do this.*

*It is important now, based on the accumulated evidence, to suspect some form of pornography addiction. You now need to ask directly if Jack is accessing pornography on the internet. He eventually acknowledges that he has. But he quickly mentions it is just harmless fun, and it is not out of control. [The above scenario is used to show that people can go to great lengths to try and hide their sin.]*

*It is important now to get to specifics, as part of your next task is to bring conviction to Jack and a realisation of the seriousness of his sin. Good questions would be:*

- So how often do you access internet pornography? [It is important to distinguish between very occasional use and addiction. Both are sin, but with addiction, the process of repentance and recovery from the sin can take longer.]
- When do you do it?
- What type of pornography do you look at? Homosexual? Deviant sex?
- What accompanies the internet pornography? Masturbation? Fantasising?

### Identify the thinking behind the sin

Jack has already indicated that he thinks his pornography addiction is “harmless.” You can uncover some of his thinking behind this sin by asking questions like:

- How do you think your wife and children will feel about your use of pornography? How will it / has it impacted your relationship with them? How has it impacted your sexual relationship with your wife?
- Do you believe pornography is sin? [It is important during the process to establish Jack’s spiritual position, and whether he professes to be a Christian. His eventual repentance or otherwise will be evidence of whether he is converted or not.]
- What impact do you believe the pornography industry has on some of the people making pornography? Are woman / children often victims of the industry? Does it harm them?
- How has pornography affected your quiet times and relationship with God (if Jack was having those before he started using pornography)?

### Change thinking through teaching

You now need to use Scripture to convict Jack of the sin of pornography. It is important to start using some of the biblical terminology for the sin. The words “pornography” and “addiction” do not occur in most versions of the Bible. However, the Bible speaks clearly on:

- Slavery to sin
- Sexual immorality, uncleanness and fornication, which includes pornography, sex outside of marriage etc.

It is very important to do two things in this phase of the counselling process:

- (i) Bring conviction of sin and repentance regarding this sin. Scriptures can be used that indicate that all sexual immorality and fornication are sin, and bring guilt and shame (Gal. 5:19-21; Mk. 7:21-23; Jn. 8:34; 1 Cor. 6:18 etc).
- (ii) Offer hope to him if he repents and turns from his sin. God offers forgiveness of sin and cleansing in Christ (passages such as 1 Jn. 1:6-7 and Isa. 55:7 can be used). God also gives us His Holy Spirit to empower believers to live godly lives (passages such as Rom. 6:20-23).

This phase of the counselling process is trying to achieve the following outcomes:

- Jack realises that pornography is sin and confesses it as such.

- Jack acknowledges that pornography has had many negative impacts on his life (spiritual, family, work).
- Jack believes that there is hope in the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome this sin / addiction.

After working through some of these issues, Jack does indeed break down and confess that he has been sinful. He prays and asks Christ for forgiveness. He also confesses his sin to his wife, and asks for her forgiveness.

#### Identifying the new behaviour to put on

You are overjoyed at the victory in Jack's life. You identify some new behaviours for Jack to embrace:

- A programme of Scripture reading and / or books for Jack to work through.
- Regular quiet time.
- A commitment to spend time with family.
- A commitment to avoid all forms of pornography.
- Some accountability to yourself and Jack's wife – a monthly check up to ensure Jack has remained pure.

Jack thanks you very much for your help.

#### A critical consideration

A most likely scenario is that Jack will be phoning you within 14 days to say he has fallen into the same sin. He has accessed pornography again, and is confused why he has not had victory.

What has gone wrong? It is very important with certain types of sin to spend time identifying and making provision for dealing with an addiction. Pornography is extremely addictive, and statistics indicate that someone who is addicted will return to it within 14 days after acknowledging it.

#### Dealing with addiction

Addiction relies on 3 pillars:

- (i) Affordability (lots of pornography on the internet is free!)
- (ii) Availability (now just a click of the mouse and one can view it in privacy of one's own home)
- (iii) Anonymity (one can view it from the privacy of one's own home with little risk of being discovered)

In order to deal with a pornography addiction, some of the following steps are essential:

Break the availability:

- Software is available that will filter out pornographic content. It is more effective on PCs than smart phones. The password to the software obviously needs to be given to someone accountable and reliable.

- *Avoiding the occasions when pornography is accessed. For Jack, this may require not using his computer in private. He should always be in a space where his wife or colleagues can walk in at any time and see the screen.*
- *If all else fails, get rid of the smartphone! Your soul is more important than being connected.*

*Breaking the anonymity:*

- *Software such as “Covenant eyes” reports all internet activity to a responsible party.*
- *A very regular physical check of internet history on the phone and PC. If the history has been wiped, then you will assume Jack has been accessing pornography.*

*In addition, it is important to identify any triggers that give occasion to lapses. Things to look out for are boredom, fights with spouse etc.*

*Then a strict system of accountability needs to be set up, that will monitor and check behaviour very regularly - preferably daily in the beginning. Research shows that it will take at least 90 consecutive days of non-use of pornography to make a substantial breakthrough in someone’s life. Jack will still have to be cautious after that with continued accountability.*

*For information, the following twelve-step recovery programme (for alcohol) can be used for most addictions:*

1. *Admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character*
7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings*
8. *Made a list of persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, we promptly admitted it*
11. *Sought to improve our conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs*

## Recommended Reading

The following books and authors are recommended:

### Books:

Jay E Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, Zondervan.

Jay E Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, P&R

Larry Crabb, *Basic Principles of Biblical Counselling*, MarshallPickering

Joel James, *Counsel with Confidence*, Shepherd Press

### Authors:

Wayne Mack

Gary R Collins

Paul Tripp

# Appendix A: Personal Information Templates

# Personal Data Inventory Form

## GENERAL INFORMATION:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Business Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Height \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: Single \_\_\_ Going Steady \_\_\_ Married \_\_\_

Separated \_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_

Education (last year completed): \_\_\_\_\_ (grade)

Other training (list type and years completed) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Referred here by \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

## HEALTH INFORMATION:

Rate your health (check): Very Good \_\_\_ Good \_\_\_ Average \_\_\_

Declining \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Your approximate weight (kgs.) \_\_\_\_\_

Weight changes recently: Lost \_\_\_ Gained \_\_\_

List all important present or past illnesses or injuries or handicaps:

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Date of last medical examination \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Reports \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Are you presently taking any medication? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

What? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever used drugs for other than medical purposes? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

What? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever had a severe emotional upset? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

What? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been arrested? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Are you willing to sign a release of information form so that your counsellor may write for social, psychiatric, or medical reports? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you recently suffered the loss of someone who was close to you?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Explain:

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Have you recently suffered other serious loss: social, business, financial, other?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Explain:

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## RELIGIOUS INFORMATION

Denominational preference \_\_\_\_\_

Member? \_\_\_\_\_

Church attendance per month (circle): 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+

Church attended in childhood? \_\_\_\_\_

Baptised? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Religious background of spouse (if married) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consider yourself a religious person? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Uncertain \_\_\_

Do you believe in God? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Uncertain \_\_\_

Do you pray to God? Never \_\_\_ Occasionally \_\_\_ Often \_\_\_

Are you saved? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Not sure what you mean \_\_\_

How much do you read the Bible? Never \_\_\_ Occasionally \_\_\_ Often \_\_\_

Do you have regular family devotions? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Explain recent changes in your life, if any.

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## PERSONALITY INFORMATION

Have you ever had any psychotherapy or counselling before?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ If yes, list counsellor or therapist and dates.

What was the outcome?

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Check any of the following words which best describe you now:

active \_\_\_ ambitious \_\_\_ self-confident \_\_\_ persistent \_\_\_ nervous \_\_\_

hardworking \_\_\_ impatient \_\_\_ impulsive \_\_\_ moody \_\_\_ often-blue \_\_\_

excitable \_\_\_ imaginative \_\_\_ calm \_\_\_ serious \_\_\_ easy-going \_\_\_ shy \_\_\_ good-

natured \_\_\_ introvert \_\_\_ extrovert \_\_\_ likable \_\_\_ leader \_\_\_ quiet \_\_\_ hard-

boiled \_\_\_ submissive \_\_\_ lonely \_\_\_ self-conscious \_\_\_ sensitive \_\_\_ other \_\_\_

Have you ever felt people were watching you? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Do people's faces ever seem disoriented? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Do you ever have difficulty distinguishing faces? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Do colours ever seem too bright? \_\_\_\_\_ Too dull? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you sometimes unable to judge distance? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever had hallucinations? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Are you afraid of being in a car? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Is your hearing exceptionally good? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Do you have problems sleeping? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY INFORMATION

Name of spouse \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Your spouse's age \_\_\_\_\_ Education (in years) \_\_\_\_\_

Your spouse's Religion \_\_\_\_\_

Is spouse willing to come for counselling? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Uncertain \_\_\_

Have you ever been separated? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ When?

Date of marriage \_\_\_\_\_

Your ages when married; Husband \_\_\_ Wife \_\_\_

How long did you know your spouse before marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

Length of steady dating with spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Length of engagement \_\_\_\_\_

Give brief information about any previous marriages:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Give brief information about any previous significant relationships:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Information about children:

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Living? Y/N

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Married? Y/N

2. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Living? Y/N

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Married? Y/N

3. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Living? Y/N

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Married? Y/N

4. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Living? Y/N

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Married? Y/N

5. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Living? Y/N

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Married? Y/N

If you were raised by anyone other than your own parents, briefly explain:

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How many older brothers \_\_\_\_ sisters \_\_\_\_ do you have?

How many younger brothers \_\_\_\_ sisters \_\_\_\_ do you have?

## Influential People

Name the influential people in your life currently and give a brief description of their influence on you:

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### BRIEFLY ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What is your problem?

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2. What have you done about it?

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3. What can we do? (What are your expectations in coming here?)

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4. As you see yourself, what kind of person are you? Describe yourself.

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5. What, if anything, do you fear?

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6. Is there any other information we should know?

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