

Sharing Scripture in Counseling

Introduction:

When handling God's word we want to exercise humility and unyielding discernment, so we can give intentional thought, have close observations, and bring careful discussion to the text. "Depending upon the Bible for counsel is a high call that warrants a reverent fear of the one whose words are translated to others"¹.

in Sharing Scripture in Counseling:

10 Cautions for Improper Use of Scripture in Biblical Counseling:

Caution#1: Give hope to an unbeliever that is meant for a believer.

Caution#2: Misapplying wisdom.

Caution#3: Proof-texting.

Caution#4: Not using scripture at all.

Caution#5: Going to scripture too soon.

Caution#6: Using too many scriptures.

Caution#7: Using scriptures prescriptively.

Caution#8: Using it as a weapon, we are not sin hunters.

Caution#9: Monologue vs Dialogue.

Caution#10: Emphasizing opinions as a higher value than scripture.

we Share Scripture in Counseling:

"The goal of biblical counseling is spiritual, relational, and personal maturity as evidenced in desires, thoughts, motives, actions, and emotions that increasingly reflect Jesus (Ephesians 4:17-5:2). *BCC (Biblical counselors)* believe that such personal change must be centered on the person of Christ *and* are convinced that personal ministry centered on Christ and anchored in Scripture offers the only lasting hope and loving help to a fallen and broken world".²

During Session. After we examine their struggle, by listening well and asking good questions, we move to encourage them through Scripture. We want to:

- Offer hope "a confident expectation based on the promises of God" (Rom 8; 15: 4;13, Lam. 3:19-24, 2 Cor. 4:16-18).
- Help them become devoted to spiritual disciplines (2 Peter 1:3-11). To grow in godliness is to grow both in our devotion to God and in our likeness to His character.
- Recognize, Repent, and Respond.
- Recall God's faithfulness, to fix their eyes on Jesus, to preserve/endure, to have faith/trust, to stir their heart in gratitude, practice self-control, to be motivated in love, speak truth to themselves, etc. This should carry them forward when they find themselves, outside of the counseling room, and faced with their crisis/struggle/hardship.

Through Prayer. We share scripture through praying - before and after the session we want to personally pray scripture over them, during the session we want to model how to pray and teach them the importance of prayer, after the session we encourage them to pray scripture over their situation.

4 Points about prayer:

Point#1. Prayer is offered in faith (James 1:6) to God the Father - through the enabling grace and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26) - in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 16:23).

Point#2. Jesus prayed (Matt. 26:36), taught his disciples to pray and warned against empty words (Matt. 6:5-15). Jesus prayed for others: He prayed for their faith (Lk 22:32), against temptation in their lives (Lk 22:40), for their unity (Jn 17:11), and for their sanctification (Jn. 17:17). Help your counselee know that Jesus himself prayed.

¹ Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2018), 71.

² <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>

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Point#3. Paul modeled prayer. He instructed the church to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:16), and he asked for them to pray for him (2 Thess. 3:1-2). In his letters how he took time to write his specific prayers for the church, for his people. Help your counselee know things to pray for.

- Paul prayed for the salvation of the lost (Rom. 10:1).
- He prayed that the brothers would stay on the right path (2 Cor. 13:7).
- He prayed that believers would be strengthened by the Spirit, rooted and grounded in love, able to comprehend God's love, and filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-19).
- Paul prays that the Romans might "abound in hope" and know the presence of "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:13, 33).
- Paul prays that the Ephesians to have "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" and he wants Christ to "dwell in [their] hearts through faith" (Eph. 1:17, 3:17).
- Paul yearns for the Philippians to abound in discerning love (Phil 1:9).
- and for the Colossians to give thanks like heaven-bound saints (Col. 3:12).
- Paul asks that the Thessalonians might be holy through and through (1 Thess. 5:23).

Point#4. Pray Scripture - The Bible is packed with truth that is relevant in all of our lives, so take the word of God and pray specific scripture. Help your counselee learn to pray well.

- Pray God's _____; *guard me from temptation* (Matt. 26:41), *free me from pride, idolatry, and addictions* (1 Cor. 10:13), *help me to walk in a manner worthy of You* (Col. 1:9-13), *help me put my hope in You alone* (2 Cor. 4:16-18), *give me faith that perseveres* (1 Sam. 12:23-24), *strengthen me to endure the battle* (Eph. 6:10-20).
- Pray God's _____; *Your steadfast love endures forever* (Ps. 100:5), *Your word is true and equips me for every good work* (2 Tim. 3:16), *in You I have joy and peace that surpasses all understanding* (Phil. 4:7), *I trust in You to lead and protect me* (Prov. 3:5-8).
- Pray for _____; *walk by the Spirit and not gratify the flesh* (Gal. 5:16, 22-24), *humility* (Ps 25:9, Matt 23:12, Phil 2:3-4), *motivated by love* (1 Jn. 4:7-21), *imitator of Christ* (1 Cor. 11:1), *compassionate, kind, patient, wise, grateful, forgiving* (Col 3:12-17), *glorify God in all they do* (1 Cor. 10:31), *devoted to godliness* (1 Tim. 4:8).

In Growth Assignments. We share scripture in counseling by assigning growth assignments because we want to emphasize the importance of their time in between our session.

- It should facilitate biblical sanctification.
- Should help establish dependence on God's Word rather than on the counselor.
- Should emphasize key spiritual disciplines. Seek to include Scripture reading, Scripture memorization, prayer, church attendance with notetaking, and seeking community. You can also provide specific reflection questions and supplemental topical reading when applicable.
- Target five types: Something to read, write, hear, do, and memorize.
- Should be fruitful and effective (Col. 1:9-14) and help establish a pattern of action and habit (Eph. 4:22-23, James 1:22). What's happening in between the counseling sessions is instrumental to develop new habits for living a godly life and growing in their dependency on the Lord. When creating and communicating assignments, strive for clarity so when it's done properly, they can see the results and you can then rejoice with them.
- Should address the heart (thinking, emotions, action) and strive to address all areas needing growth: physical, spiritual, relational, emotional, and situational.
- Should help them interpret the difficulties of life through a biblical lens with the focus on God: His character, promises, and purposes; Christ: His life, ministry, and character; Holy Spirit: His role, guidance, and help; Scripture: praying, thinking, and living biblically. We want the truth of Scripture to reveal practical application, helping to strengthen their commitment and reliance on the Word (John 17:17; Matt. 7:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; Ps. 19, 86, 119; Phil. 2:12-16).
- Should stir their heart toward Worship. Scripture is full of songs of praise, worship the Lord, stirring our hearts to gratitude. Read Colossians 3:16 and encourage them to worship. Share a Psalm 33: Our call to worship, cause for worship, confidence from worship. "Great worship grows out of great doctrine". Share scripture through hymn, lyrics from theologically sound songs, Psalms of Ascents (120-134) that was sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for annual feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Booths.

of Sharing Scripture in Counseling:

_____ . This is the one you need to be careful about because you don't want to take it out of context. But a few examples of this would be.

- 1 John 1:9 – to lead someone in confession.
- Psalm 46:10 – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”.
- Jeremiah 2:13 – struggling with idolatry, going to the Lord who is the fountain of living water.
- Col. 3:2 – set their minds on things above or 4:2 – to continue steadfastly in prayer.

_____ .
1. Philippians 4:6-9 – In the situation, our thinking can take us on a downward spiral, but Paul gives us a three-fold plan for overcoming worry by praying, thinking and living biblically.

Praying biblically v6-7. We can take our concerns, fears, doubts, emotions to the Lord in prayer. God gives us the gift of peace, an “inner calm and tranquility,” in response to our thankful and trusting prayers. Pray confidently, knowing that in the midst of these circumstances you can trust that God is in control with a plan and purpose.

Thinking biblically v8. When we are spiritually blind, our thoughts are futile and cause us to focus on our hurt, pain, inadequacies, or failures. But by God's grace we can have the ability to think rightly, so after Paul directs us to pray with a thankful heart, he gives us a guide for what to think about. “*Whatever is true,*” (meditate on God's Word); “*whatever is honorable,*” (be in awe of the Lord's power and provision); “*whatever is just,*” (reflect on what is righteous and holy); “*whatever is pure,*” (dwell on what is morally clean or undefiled); “*whatever is lovely,*” (focus on what is kind or gracious); and “*whatever is commendable,*” (consider virtues of courage or respect). The Holy Spirit is working in us, renewing our mind (Rom. 12:2) so that our mind has the ability to think about what is “*excellent*” and “*worthy of praise.*”

Living biblically v9. Praying and thinking biblically must precede living biblically because our thoughts affect our behavior. Self-focused thoughts can hinder us spiritually by shifting our focus from the omnipotent God to our own desires (Mark 4:19), which is why Jesus refutes anxiety with truth, promises, and reason in Matthew 6:25-34. We cannot allow anxiousness to hold us back from fully living and serving our Almighty God. Paul had first-hand experience in living righteously in the midst of trials and tribulations. When he wrote to practice the things you “*have learned and received and heard and seen in me,*” he knew that for his readers (both then and now) the result would be the peace of God despite hard circumstances.

2. Isaiah 40:28-31; 41:10 – discuss the Attributes of God and encourage them to focus and rest in who God is.

- **V28 – God is Eternal.** Things around us are wasting away, unstable, uncertain, untrustworthy, unsafe, unpredictable...we can rest in knowing that God is none of these things. He is eternal, he is unchanging, he is stable, he is limitless, he is without bounds. *In our situation we can trust in God's promises, that are forever. God's love is everlasting, His goodness, comfort, faithfulness, peace, joy, and graciousness are all everlasting. It doesn't change based off how we feel.*
- **V28 – God is Creator** - His sovereignty is not removed from His creation; he created us to be in relationship with him. *I know in your situation it might seem like God isn't with you, but God is near and active, supplying all you need when you need it to endure this struggle.*
- **V28 – God is all-powerful.** God has created us with limitations, we will grow weary and faint. God doesn't, he has unlimited power. *You might feel weak, that you can't do it, but God is the giver of power, He is the one who increases and renews our strength. Let's go to Him together.*
- **V28 – God is Incomprehensible** which means we can never fully understand God. God's greatness is beyond searching out or discovering; it is too great to ever be fully known. **God is all-knowing.** God knows us, everything about us (Ps. 139:1-6), and his knowledge is without limitation (Jer. 32:17). *In our struggle we typically try to figure things out so we can fix them, but we don't have to because we can go to the one who knows it all and that has a plan & purpose for our life.*

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3. Proverbs 3:5-8 -using a passage with a chart (Concerns/Responsibilities) in session to encourage them to trust God alone in their situation. What areas of their life are their responsibilities to steward well and what areas are they trying to control that should be taken to God in prayer? Help them put their trust in the Lord and not lean on their own understanding. *Another example Ephesians 4 and using the Emotion log or 'Y' chart.

_____. You can read them a passage of Scripture and walk through some important points. Get their feedback throughout the conversation, listen.

- Refer to handout example of Psalm 27
- Ephesians Chapter 2 – identity and unity in Christ
- Psalm 25 – waiting, trusting in the Lord and/or for depression & anxiety.
- Psalm 13 – share how to lament.

_____. You won't review this at once, but you can use a letter of the Bible to encourage someone in a specific area for growing in godliness.

- 1 John – Abiding in Christ, to see the fullness of God's Love.
- 1 Peter – Share hope in suffering.

_____. You can meet for a few weeks and work through the narrative together. Or for a shorter narrative, like Jonah, you can ask them to read before. This would depend on the situation shared.

- Refer to handout example of Jonah.

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Psalm 27

When our fear is misplaced, it can paralyze us and cause unnecessary worry or anxiety. It's important to understand the object of our fear so we can redirect our self-centered fear to a God-centered fear. We can learn from David in Psalm 27, when his adversaries were out to kill him, he prayed and found refuge in the Lord who was ultimately in control. Despite his enemies, David rejoiced in the waiting and in the uncertainties by having confidence in God alone. The points below are not an exhaustive list of the truths in Psalm 27 but are a few reminders to encourage you on how to have a reverent God-centered fear.

In Session Counseling

David prayed in adoration.

- *The Lord is my light* (v1)– the light overcomes darkness.
- *The Lord is my salvation* (v1)– guarantees the defeat of all enemies and provides eternal hope.
- *The Lord is my stronghold* (v1)– assures safety, refuge and protection against all assaults.

David rested in virtues that came from the Lord.

- *I will be confident* (v3) – assurance that God is in control and has the power to save.
- *I will sing and make melody to the Lord* (v6) – he worshipped and had joy despite the circumstances.
- *Be strong, take courage* (v13) – courage came when David trusted in God's strength.
- *Wait for the Lord* (v13) – being patient in God's timing is essential to eliminate anxiety and bring peace.

David sought God for wisdom and direction.

- *Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud* (v7) – David prays for continued victory knowing that his safety and salvation is from God alone.
- *Teach me your way* (v11) – He relied on the word and will of God, praying for wisdom and direction.
- *Lead me on a level path* (v11) – David had to have trust and faith in God, knowing He is the only one who could provide ultimate protection against his enemies.

David kept his eyes on the Lord.

- *Gaze upon the beauty of the Lord* (v4) – David gazed on God's goodness and graciousness, being in awe of who God is, which allowed his fear to be in reverence of His great power.
- *Your face, Lord, do I seek* (v8) – David prayed and desired the Lord in the time of trouble. He sought his beauty, guidance and refuge.
- *The Lord will take me in* (v10) – despite the abandonment from his parents, he had faith the Lord would not forsake him.

After Session Assignment

1. What are you currently fearful of in your life? Do you have a misplaced fear? Journal your thoughts and pray for the Lord to reveal areas to surrender and submit.
2. Do you feel attacked, unloved or hurt? Do you have enemies that seem to be at war against you? Consider those that you might be at odds with and discuss this with your counselor.
3. Write out all the things Psalms 27 says about God. Meditate on this truth and write out how this practically brings you comfort, peace, strength and confidence?
4. What virtues could you begin praying for? Patience, courage, joy, strength? How might each of these help you grow in your spiritual maturity?

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Jonah – Run to God

The Lord commanded the prophet Jonah to preach against the wickedness of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom. Assyria was a ruthless and idolatrous nation. However, Jonah was stubborn and instead chose to flee to Tarshish, stating, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2). Jonah wanted justice his way for Nineveh to receive God’s judgment by being destroyed. In the book of Jonah, we learn how to respond to the will of God and how to share the love and mercy of God with others.

Have your counselee read the whole book of Jonah prior to your session and write out the things they learned about Jonah and about God. Note: There is a lot to cover within these four chapters, so you may not be able to cover all of it in one session. The questions below are just to get your conversation started as the Lord reveals more to you both.

In Session Counseling

Discuss the takeaways that your counselee had about Jonah and about God. Take time to listen and discern their understanding. Ask questions such as the following:

- How would you summarize what happened in the book of Jonah?
- How would you describe Jonah?
- Did Jonah have reasons to be angry toward the Assyrians?
- What do you observe about Jonah’s actions? How did God respond?
- In what ways do you relate to Jonah?
- What did you learn about God in this narrative?

Communicate your gratefulness in their sharing and then begin discussing the few points below to bring encouragement in their area of struggle.

What do we learn about Jonah?

Jonah was angry. Why? He didn’t want to see God’s mercy extended to his enemies. In his bitterness and pride he felt they were undeserving of His love, wanted justice his way and felt Nineveh should be destroyed. *Have you ever felt this about somebody?*

Jonah was disobedient. How? He was unfaithful to God’s command and ran away in his pride and stubbornness. He felt spiritually superior and, in his grumbling, would have preferred to die than show them mercy. *Have you ever been disobedient to the Lord’s command?*

Jonah was repentant. Where? In the belly of the whale. Despite his efforts to run away, the Lord was persistent and forgiving. Jonah expected to die but realized the Lord spared him. He prayed for God’s help (2:1-2), he accepted God’s discipline (2:3), he trusted God’s promises (2:4-7) and yielded to God’s will (2:8-9). Jonah couldn’t save himself, but the goodness of God brings him to repentance. So, we see Jonah go from rebellion to repentance. *When have you gone from rebellion to repentance? Is there anything you need to repent of now?*

What do we learn about God?

God is sovereign. God will accomplish what He wants through us, despite our objections or procrastination. How much easier it would be if we, unlike Jonah, would submit to Him without delay!

God is omnipresent. We cannot hide from God; He is always with us. Despite Jonah’s attempt to run away, God was with him in his obedience and disobedience.

God is gracious. He disciplines Jonah through his disobedience. He hears him (4:1-4), comforts him (4:5-8), teaches him (4:9-11), and restores his ministry. Jonah, a man who lacked compassion for people who would perish and live eternally apart from God, was still used to bring a whole city to faith in the Lord.

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God is merciful. Nineveh, an enemy of Israel, had moved away from God and into idolatry. The people were wicked, yet the Lord magnified his sovereignty and showed them love and mercy. No matter how awful our sin, we can be spared judgment like the Ninevites if we seek God's mercy and choose the path of humility and repentance.

After Session Assignment

Read Jonah again this week and reflect on the things we discussed in session. Journal through the questions below as the Lord continues to reveal areas for growth.

1. How are you encouraged knowing that God has a plan for you according to His purpose and will accomplish it? Read Ephesians 2:4-10 and Romans 8:28.
2. Read Proverbs 18:10. Do you tend to run away from the Lord? Run *to* the Lord, not away *from* Him.
3. Do you struggle with pride? Are you ever impatient with others who are spiritually ignorant or immature? Wanting justice in your own way, in your own timing?
4. How can you practically begin trusting the Lord and run to Him when you have been wronged, become angry, and desire worldly justice?
5. Is there someone in your life that God might be using to get your attention, like the men on the boat?
6. Read 2 Peter 3:9. Do you need to seek God's mercy and repent? Is there someone else in your life that you can show God's mercy and help them with their struggle in sin/disobedience?