

Editorial

## ACADEMICS IN (OR AND?) BIBLICAL COUNSELING

*Dr. Greg E. Gifford<sup>1</sup>*

*At times I don't want to write academic papers. I find them to be drudgery, esoteric, potentially relevant (potentially not), and having very little immediate impact on the everyday ministry of the counselor. There is a blue-collar wisdom within me that asks, "how are you going to make money with that?" Or, more accurately, "will anybody read this?"*

It takes discipline on my part to write academic papers—and to read them. I discipline myself toward reading and writing academically for a few reasons: first, it allows my thoughts to gain clarity and (potentially) be changed. That's right. In the counseling room, I'm siloed. In the counseling room, I am the authority about what the Bible says. But in academia, I subject my ideas to a group of trained experts and ask them if it's true. That process is valuable, and it makes my counseling better.

Second, reading and writing academically helps me have a clear apologetic. If pragmatism wins, then I will be at the ebb-and-flow of whatever seems to work in counseling. The neo-integrationists suggest an idea that sounds a lot like Bessel van Der Kolk re-warmed, and I can be enticed. Why? Because it seems to work. Knowing theories and positions is an academic work and it gives you the eyes to see error. Pragmatism can rule practitioners if they're not careful.

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Lastly, reading academically strengthens my counseling. It helps me to understand good exegesis, systematic theology, biblical studies, and all the things that I *need* to be a good counselor. As I have worked at The Master's University for the past 8 years, I have worked with arguably some of the best minds in biblical and theological studies. And it has been transformative. In the counseling room, I have worksheets and application points from theology. In academia, my very position is tested against the sure Word of God. Academics will be the protection of good counseling methodology going forward. We will only be as strong as the institutions teaching biblical counseling.

The JBSC exists to make the counselor better. How? By addressing the upstream issues that counselors are utilizing in the counseling room.

Michael Burgos is going to speak to the use of the moral law in biblical counseling. His work is providing a place for those Old Testament books that you might be unsure of how to use in counseling.

Sam Stephens is one of the sharpest minds currently in biblical counseling. I know this first-hand as a peer in our PhD programs together. He dismantles the “biblical-counselor-as-missionary-to-psychology” arguments. Anything that Stephens writes, you should read, including this article.

Ryan Thomas analyzes the anthropology of EMDR and reconstructs a biblical anthropology. He exposes psychiatry’s lack of validity in the utilization of EMDR, to end by reminding the biblical counselor of the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling.

Lastly, and quite remarkably, we have a response. The response is to Ed Welch’s article published in Spring 2024, entitled “Common Grace, Knowing People, and the Biblical Counselor.” Francine Tan addresses the multiple concerns with Welch’s paper. Tan suggests that there are inconsistencies, theological and biblical, that need to be considered. Remember, peer review is an important part of excellence in commitment to the Scripture. I think you’ll find Tan’s critique to be just that effort to be excellent.

*May God give us grace to honor his sufficient word for his glory and the good of our counselees!*