

Editorial

THE COMMON GRACE RIPPLE EFFECT

Dr. Greg E. Gifford¹

During the Fall of 2024, I presented a paper at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in San Diego, CA. It was part of a four-lecture session that was dedicated to biblical counseling and varying viewpoints within biblical counseling and viewpoints of biblical counseling were offered. Nate Brooks, Malcom Yarnell, Ken Keathley and I presented papers. It was an interesting time, much of which was a critique of biblical counseling and Heath Lambert to be exact. It demonstrated that there is a lack of clarity on the true nature of biblical counseling—and who represents biblical counseling.

It was also around that time that I was working on the Sufficiency Statement that has now been widely distributed. The Sufficiency Statement is a confession to help biblical counselors better understand common grace, special and general revelation, and natural knowledge. If you have not seen it yet, please visit the website: sufficiencystatement.com. There are hundreds of signatories who have decided to endorse this statement on biblical sufficiency. It really has become a definitive moment in the history of biblical counseling.

Both ETS and the Sufficiency Statement are a part of broader definitional trends occurring right now in biblical counseling. I'll call this the common grace ripple-effect. First of all, an ACBC Colloquium two years ago helped to initiate a conversation on common grace, Heath Lambert's book on common grace, and JBSC editions have all spoken to the nature of common grace. However, the issue is largely unsettled in the biblical counseling

¹ Dr. Greg E. Gifford is general editor of the *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* and Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling and Chair of the School of Biblical Studies at The Master's University in Santa Clarita, CA. He can be reached at ggifford@masters.edu.

movement. The ripple-effect is not that we have greater clarity on common grace but have formed camps around the use of common grace in biblical counseling. Meaning, some organizations shoe-horn all pragmatic methods with a common grace license, while others are protectionist against anything potentially secular. The emergence of different camps in this climate is helpful in many ways because different approaches to counseling are being articulated and practiced.

The formation of these biblical counseling camps regarding common grace are not wrong, either. To have a difference of conviction on the place of common grace is not an absolute of the Christian faith but will obviously have doctrinal and methodological implications for biblical counseling. In this way, the neo-integrationist is not my enemy, just someone with whom I share differing convictions. In a world of biblical counseling in higher education, my convictions are quite settled, but I still see them as *convictions*.

It may be that in this time we see clearly identified camps of “unlimited common grace” and “limited common grace.” It seems many positions are settled, and it is better to create new categories of “clinically informed biblical counseling” or “holistic biblical counseling” rather than “biblical counseling.” Perhaps that is the results of the common grace ripple effect? We aren’t moving positions closer to each other but actually clarifying the positions that exist in biblical counseling.

Where to next?

This JBSC edition is fascinating, in part, because Dr. Ed Welch has written to respond to Francine Tan’s critique of his colloquium article. Welch has done much good for the BC movement, and Tan has raised concerns on his paper from the Spring 2024 edition of the JBSC. It really is a healthy dialogue, and I tremendously appreciate Ed taking the time to clarify his position. It was Ed’s article critiquing Jay Adams that really captivated my younger self in learning how Ed clarified helpful statements that Jay was not as precise as he could be. (If you haven’t read the article, see Ed’s article, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adams’ View of the Flesh and An Alternative”). Good critiques and dialogue make us sharper, *if* we actually take the time to listen to them.

Dr. Matt Rehrer is quickly becoming the expert on issues that seem to bridge our physiology with our inner person. As pastor, medical doctor, and biblical counselor we are learning much from him and I trust his article on memory will be of help to you.

Dr. Erik Everhart has provided more of an overview of models that are used in counseling trauma. Dr. Everhart provides twelve principles for allowing us to think through these methods of care for trauma. Dr. Michael Emlet has also provided us with a case for using your body to better worship God and facilitate change in his article, which he presented at the 2024 ACBC Colloquium and then published originally in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. Robert Piertz spends time introducing Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) then providing you, as the reader, an opportunity to see if it truly is compatible with the Bible. Piertz helps provide the upstream information for you to engage this ideology well, then address it in the counseling room.

As always, remember that the JBSC is attempting to address the upstream issues facing biblical counseling and soul care. If you have an article that fits the scope of the JBSC, please send it our way.

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