As I speak around the country on biblical counseling, I typically hear two very different responses. Sometimes I’m asked, “When you say ‘biblical counseling,’ you don’t mean __________ do you?” Various people fill in that blank with different labels—negative to them. What a shame that placing the word “biblical” in front of “counseling” causes some in the church to recoil in fear.

But there’s good news—the tide is turning. I consistently hear comments like, “God has used biblical counseling to change my life.” And, “Our church’s biblical counseling ministry is impacting our entire congregation and our community for God’s glory.”

It’s exciting to reflect on what God is doing as He empowers leaders to equip His people to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:11-16). With that reality as the backdrop, here are the top ten positive trends that I see in biblical counseling today—shared in reverse order, of course, to heighten the anticipation.

10. A Collegial Spirit

Increasingly, members of biblical counseling organizations are choosing to work together and to learn from each other. The 2010 launch of the Biblical Counseling Coalition (BCC) ([http://bit.ly/ez9xOj](http://bit.ly/ez9xOj)) is just one example. The vision of Pastor James MacDonald ([http://bit.ly/IZbio](http://bit.ly/IZbio)) and Pastor Steve Viars ([http://bit.ly/9xfq8q](http://bit.ly/9xfq8q)), the BCC exists to strengthen churches, para-church organizations, and educational institutions by promoting excellence and unity in biblical counseling as a means to accomplish compassionate outreach and effective discipleship. BCC President Steve Viars, explains this collegial vision:

“The BCC is about relationships and resources. Relationships because we believe that together we can accomplish more. Resources because we want to help everyone interested in practicing biblical counseling in their churches to have the best tools and training possible.”

9. A Positive Perspective

At times, modern biblical counseling has suffered under the stereotype of what it was against. A shift is taking place as biblical counseling focuses more on a positive presentation of what it is for. Pastor James MacDonald explains the transition:

“Like every move of God, biblical counseling is ready and poised to move from the establishment phase to development phase. This means getting beyond the pejorative of infancy and the infighting of adolescence into a thoughtful measured broader biblical counseling coalition. At a recent national biblical counseling conference, I had the privilege of gathering with the ‘next generation’ leaders. The Lord led me to challenge them to step past the nuances of our different methods and into the agreement that anyone seeking to solve people’s complex problems from a biblical anthropology and a foundational commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture was on our team. Everyone agreed that the time has come to rally
together for the sake of the Gospel and for hurting people everywhere who need what only Christ can bring. Biblical counseling as a unified movement is on the rise.”

8. A New Gen Leadership


7. An Emphasis on Compassionate Care

There was a time when “modern biblical counseling” was stereotyped by some as “harsh confrontation.” That label is dissipating as biblical counselors embrace a growing commitment to loving engagement. Biblical counseling provides compassionate soul care through sustaining and healing for suffering and gentle, humble spiritual direction for sin and sanctification through reconciling and guiding.

6. A Culturally-Informed Approach

The biblical counseling movement is maturing through the contributions of a growing multiethnic group of women and men. Elyse Fitzpatrick (http://bit.ly/8mPcF4) and Laura Hendrickson (http://bit.ly/fwiLBF) are just two examples of women with Gospel-centered biblical counseling ministries. Dr. Charles Ware (http://bit.ly/hZQVEC), Pastor Deepak Reju, and Pastor Robert Cheong are representative of a diverse group of individuals embracing biblical counseling.

5. A Comprehensive Model

In the past, biblical counseling might have been seen by some as somewhat one-dimensional with a focus on combating the impact of the fall/sin. Today, biblical counseling comprehensively examines creation (understanding people from God’s original design), fall (diagnosing problems resulting from sin), and redemption (prescribing God’s solutions through our salvation and sanctification in Christ). Fresh approaches are comprehensively emphasizing our relational (spiritual, social, and self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical nature as they seek to help people to grow in grace.

4. A Commitment to Progressive Sanctification

There is a growing linkage between biblical counseling and spiritual formation. The fruit of wise counseling is spiritually mature people who increasingly reflect Christ (relationally, rationally, volitionally, and emotionally) by enjoying and exalting God and by loving others well and wisely. Current models of biblical counseling have made great progress in teaching that the counseling process is a sub-set of the discipleship process, both of which God designs to assist us to grow in grace.
3. A Robust Presentation of the Sufficiency of Scripture

The biblical counseling movement continues to flesh-out robust and nuanced perspectives on the sufficiency, relevancy, profundity, and authority of God’s Word for Christian living. The same confidence that pastors take into the pulpit when preaching God’s Word, biblical counselors share in the personal/conversational ministry of the Word. Biblical counselors are convinced that the inspired and inerrant Scriptures, rightly interpreted and carefully applied, offer us God’s comprehensive wisdom where we learn to understand who we are, the problems we face, how people change, and God’s provision for that change in the Gospel. David Powlison (http://bit.ly/187VAT) explains it well:

“Nothing compares with Scripture for making sense of the troubles and struggles of life. Through the Word, Christ brings the exact mercies that troubled people need and the Holy Spirit forms would-be helpers into his loving, wise image. Wise counseling is in the church’s DNA.”

2. A Vision for the Entire Church

There’s a growing movement to embed biblical counseling and personal change within God’s community—the church. As Pastor Steve Viars explains, “Our goal is to not only have a counseling center, but to be a counseling center where the core doctrines of the sufficiency of Scripture and biblical progressive sanctification impact and inform every facet of our ministry.”

As part of this movement back to the local church, churches are increasingly becoming equipping centers where biblical counseling becomes a normal part of the one-another ministry of every believer. Biblical counseling organizations like CCEF (http://bit.ly/187VAT), NANC (http://bit.ly/z5VTn), and ABC (http://bit.ly/euHqSJ) are equipping pastors to equip their people.

1. A Gospel-Centered Focus

Biblical counselors are emphasizing that wise counseling centers on Jesus Christ—His sinless life, death on the cross, burial, resurrection, ascension, and promised return. Biblical counseling points people to a person, Jesus our Redeemer, and not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transformative power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people’s hearts, not in any human system of change. Wise counselors seek to lead struggling, hurting, sinning, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are available only in Christ.

Dr. Kellemen’s Bio:

Bob Kellemen, Ph.D., has pastored three churches (and launched biblical counseling ministries in each), served for a dozen years as the founding Chairman of the MA in Christian Counseling and Discipleship Department at Capital Bible Seminary (http://bit.ly/eLNdna), is the Founder and CEO of RPM Ministries (http://bit.ly/19iIUt), and serves as the Executive Director of the newly launched Biblical Counseling Coalition (http://bit.ly/ez9xOj). Bob’s sixth book on biblical counseling will be released in October 2011 by P&R: Equipping Counselors for the Local Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy.