

**A Theologically-Informed Approach to Sexual Abuse Counseling:  
Implementing the Hermeneutical Spiral**

**A Paper Presented to  
The Evangelical Theological Society  
November 16, 2011**

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By Robert W. Kellemen, Th.M., Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

What do biblical scholars and theologians have to say to pastors, biblical counselors, and Christian psychologists who offer care related to the dynamics and implications of sexual abuse recovery? This paper proposes that the Bible offers a robust, relevant, relational, and profound understanding of the damage done by sexual abuse and of a way forward toward Christ-centered healing from sexual abuse. The intent is to suggest biblical and theological building blocks that provide a way of *viewing* and *using* the Bible to develop a theology and methodology of sexual abuse counseling.

**Toward a Biblical Theology of Sexual Abuse Counseling**

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how to use the Bible accurately to conceptualize people, problems, and solutions (specifically applied to the issue of sexual abuse counseling). It seeks to demonstrate how to study the Bible effectively for understanding soul health (creation/people), soul sickness (fall/problems), and soul care, cure, and treatment (redemption/solutions). It seeks to show how to relate Christ's changeless truth to our changing times by uniting biblical truth and daily life.<sup>2</sup>

For those convinced that the Bible provides wise counsel for specific and significant soul issues, the core question is, "*In what form are those answers provided?*" For some, it seems to be a "*concordance form*"—one problem, one verse, one solution. For this author, as this paper demonstrates, the Bible provides counsel for specific and significant soul issues in a "*concept form*." This requires that we conceptualize problems using biblical wisdom principles that address the complexity of real and raw life as lived in a fallen and broken world.

Before developing this process, it is important to share some caveats. This section's header offers the first caveat: *toward* a biblical theology of sexual abuse counseling. In 1981, Walter Kaiser and Baker Books released the now classic work *Toward an Exegetical Theology*.<sup>3</sup> By using the word *toward*, Kaiser humbly acknowledged that his was not the final word, but one initial attempt at developing an exegetical model of theology. I am suggesting the same: the approach proposed herein is my current best attempt at *one* model for studying and applying the Bible to help people to grow in grace. It is neither the *final* model nor *the* model.

Second, because of the nature of human communication and basic brain processing, any model has to be presented using a somewhat linear method. Such is the case now. While the outline and development of this model will be presented step-by-step in linear fashion, the *order* is less important than the overall process. One could "jump in" at almost any point in the hermeneutical spiral. One could choose for practical or philosophical reasons to start at different "points in the outline." One could and should "move back and forth" within the process. All of this is not only acceptable, but encouraged. This paper presents an overall process for using the Bible for Christian psychology and biblical counseling; it is *not* a strait jacket.

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<sup>2</sup>For a practical model, see Robert Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.

Third, Kaiser's subtitle delineated the focus of his work: *Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. What Kaiser wrote three decades ago for preaching (the pulpit ministry of the Word) still needs to be written today for counseling (the personal ministry of the Word). We need a process that teaches us how to do *biblical exegesis for biblical counseling*. How do we use (study and apply) the Bible to help people to grow in grace, to help people in the progressive sanctification process, to help people to deal biblically with issues of suffering and sin? The outlines on pages three and four overview one possible process that moves us *toward* answering these vital questions.

Fourth, the hermeneutical spiral developed, described, and illustrated in this paper takes the works of leaders in the field such as Osborne, Thiselton, and Vanhoozer and translates their hermeneutical conceptualizations to the field biblical counseling.<sup>4</sup> The first chart outlines one model for using one formulation of the hermeneutical spiral for biblical counseling. The second chart outlines the application of this model for sexual abuse counseling.

### **The Hermeneutical Spiral for Biblical Counseling**

#### ***Academic Theology: Foundation—Information/Knowledge***

“What?”: Content and Conviction—Revealed Truth

Systematic Theology  
Biblical Theology  
Exegetical Theology  
Lexical Theology  
Textual Theology

#### ***Spiritual Theology: Formation—Transformation/Wisdom***

“So What?”: Connection, Categories, and Constructs—Relevance

#### ***Practical/Pastoral Theology: Friendship—Application/Love***

“What Now?”: Competence, Care, and Cure—Relationship

#### ***Historical Theology: Forebearers—Validation/Confirmation***

“What Then?”: Church History and Contributions of Predecessors

“Who Else?”: Current Theology and Contributions of Contemporaries

<sup>4</sup>Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev./Exp. Ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006. Anthony Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005. Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutic*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002.

**Toward a Biblical Theology of Sexual Abuse Counseling**  
**How Do We Use (Study and Apply) the Bible to Help People to Grow in Grace?**

\*Preliminary Stage: Identify Your Area of Exegesis/Analysis—What Am I Studying?

- A. Probe Life Labels, Symptoms, and Diagnosis in This Area of Concern
  - B. Ponder Biblical Categories, Constructs, and Concepts that Potentially Overlap with This Area of Concern
    - 1. Theology of Existence Categories: Creation/Fall/Redemption (CFR)
    - 2. Theology of Image Bearers Categories: Relational/Rational/Volitional/Emotional/Physical (RRVEP)
    - 3. Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction Categories: Sustaining/Healing/Reconciling/Guiding (SHRG)
- I. Explore the Scriptures by Taking Your Real-Life Questions to God’s Word: Relate God’s Truth to Human Relationships
- A. Academic Theology: What?—Content/Categories
    - 1. Systematic Theology: CFR/RRVEP/SHRG
    - 2. Biblical Theology: CFR/RRVEP/SHRG
    - 3. Exegetical Theology: CFR/RRVEP/SHRG
    - 4. Lexical Theology: CFR/RRVEP/SHRG
    - 5. Textual Theology: CRF/RRVEP/SHRG
  - B. Spiritual Theology: So What?—Connections
  - C. Practical/Pastoral Theology: What Now?—Competence
- II. Examine Past and Current Biblical Research on This Topic: Use the Wisdom of Others
- A. Historical Theology: What Then?—Contributions of Predecessors
  - B. Current Theology: Who Else?—Contributions of Contemporaries
- III. Evaluate Psychological Research and “Proverbial Observations” Regarding This Theme/Topic: A Catalyst for Deep Thinking
- A. What Does the Psychological Research Say about “Normal” Function, Disorders of Normal Functioning, and Treatment for Disorders?
  - B. What Do “Proverbial Observations” (Organization of Observations by Practitioners) Suggest about Normal Functioning, Disorders of Normal Functioning, and Treatment for This Disorder?
  - C. Analyze This Data in Light of Your Biblical Interpretations
- IV. Synthesize Your Findings: Develop a Relevant Biblical Working Model of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction for This Life Area
- A. Maintain the Relevant, Raw, Real Language and Power of the Scriptures as You Collate and Present Your Findings
  - B. Present a Biblical Psychology of the Issue: A Creation, Fall, Redemption Biblical Psychology
  - C. Develop a Biblical Counseling Approach to Soul Care and Spiritual Direction for This Issue: A Biblical Counseling Treatment Plan

## Preliminary Stage: Identify Your Area of Exegesis/Analysis—What Am I Studying?

How do we study the Bible for sexual abuse counseling? Biblical counseling derives its theory and practice from an academic, spiritual, practical/pastoral, and historical:

- **Theology of Existence:** Creation (people), fall (problems), redemption (solutions),
- **Theology of Image Bearers:** Relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings,<sup>5</sup>
- **Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction:** Sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding.<sup>6</sup>

Given this working model, one might assume that the first “step” must be to open one’s Bible. Anything less, some might imply, would be less than biblical.

However, there is a *logical* preliminary starting point even before building the *theological* foundation. Obviously, before examining something biblically we must ponder “*What is it that I am examining biblically?*” In this preliminary stage, we are seeking to identify our area of exegesis and analysis. We are beginning to label and focus our research. We are trying to develop our awareness of the type of specific life issues and questions that we are bringing to the text of Scripture. Of course, because the process is a spiral, the preliminary categories will be deepened, stretched, altered, strengthened, challenged, and the like, at each “step” in the ongoing process.

## Probe Life Labels, Symptoms, and Diagnosis in This Area of Concern—People, Problems, and Solutions

It is essential to probe and record answers to questions such as the following.

### ➤ What Topic(s) or Theme(s) Am I Researching?

Using the language and categories of real life as lived today (which is the only language we have), we attempt to label our area of research. Am I studying sexual abuse? Depression? Anxiety? Addiction/enslavement/besetting sin? Idolatry of the heart? Forgiveness? Reconciliation?

### ➤ What Questions Do I Need to Address?

In this paper, the “life area of concern” is sexual abuse counseling. Given that label, we want to ponder what questions we need to address within that category, construct, or conceptualization. Examples are limitless. Brainstorming is invaluable. Ask every “life question about sexual abuse” that comes to mind.

How is sexual abuse defined? How does sexual abuse impact the body? The soul? What does it do to issues of trust? How does it relate to shame? Self-hatred? How does it impact one’s sense of femininity? Masculinity? What is sexuality? What is gender? What is masculinity? What is femininity? What difference does it make if the sexual abuse was same-sex abuse? What does recovery/healing/growth in grace look like? How does forgiveness play a part? Confrontation? Restitution? Reconciliation? What sinful categories explain the sinful motivation of the abuser?

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<sup>5</sup>Kellemen, *Soul Physicians*.

<sup>6</sup>Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends*.

➤ **In Church History, Who Has Examined This and What Issues Did They Address?**

Later in the process, under historical theology, we will look for answers—for past wisdom that we can relate to life today. For now, we are exploring for simple awareness. We are not alone. Even issues like sexual abuse have been dealt with by that great cloud of past witnesses.<sup>7</sup> We record what questions they asked and add their insightful probings to ours.

➤ **In Current Biblical Counseling Who Is Exploring This and What Issues Are They Addressing?**

Again, later we will probe the works of others for their answers. For now, we are still trying to raise our own awareness. My own experience and encouragement is to “be brief” at this stage. While we want to increase our awareness of the type of questions to bring to the text of Scripture, we don’t want to be unduly influenced by the theory and practice of others before we develop our own biblically-based approach.

➤ **In Secular Psychology, Who Is Researching This and What Questions Are They Addressing?**

Some would suggest that we should avoid this stage. However, I believe that there is a potential catalytic impact that can be produced when we at least hear the questions being raised by secular psychologists who address real life issues. We don’t have to ask the same questions or even speak the identical “psychologized” language to have our minds stretched so that we bring real and raw questions about sexual abuse to the Word of God.

➤ **What Experience, If Any, Do I Have Counseling with This Issue and What Questions Has My Counseling Raised That I Will Want to Explore?**

We do not place human experience parallel to biblical truth. However, Solomon clearly used his life experiences in writing Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (under the Spirit’s inspiration). He brought his life lived under the sun to the Son of God and asked hard questions and offered practical counsel.

We can do the same. When we do so with an issue like sexual abuse, some of the questions we may raise, with the hopes of them being answered in later “stages” of our study, might include, “Why is sexual abuse so powerfully painful?” “Why are the emotions so intense?” “Why is forgiveness so difficult?” “Why is silence and secrecy often the response of choice?” “What happens in the female and male soul when sexual abuse occurs?” “Is sexual abuse just body abuse, or is it more soul abuse and gender abuse?”

➤ **What Experience, If Any, Do I Have Dealing with This Personally, and What Questions Has My Experience Raised That I Will Want to Explore?**

Even if we have not experienced the personal horrors of sexual abuse, we can still ponder the impact of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse, or spiritual abuse upon our own soul. And if not sexually abused ourselves, we can ponder the impact of sexual abuse upon family members or friends. Such ponderings assist us to bring pertinent, relevant, real life questions to the text of Scripture.

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<sup>7</sup>For one example of past Christian response to sexual abuse, see Robert Kellemen, *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007, 92-95.

## **Ponder Biblical Categories, Constructs, and Concepts that Potentially Overlap with This Area of Concern**

The point of the previous section (probing life labels) was to help us to move from a merely academic approach to the issue of sexual abuse to a real life approach. It seeks to help us to move from a mere one-verse-one-problem-one-solution mentality. Pondering life categories begins to create an awareness of the depth of issues, the complexity of life, and the need for Scripture that is necessary to complete powerfully the hermeneutical spiral.

In the current “stage” (ponder biblical categories), we now are armed with life categories (derived from all the questions you raised in the preceding stage) that we can begin to bring to the text—still in a preliminary way. At this time the point is *not* to answer our questions. The point is to *raise* further questions—to deepen our understanding of the type of issues that we will want to examine through academic, spiritual, practical, and historical theology.

### ➤ **What Examples of a Similar Topic Do I Find in the Scriptures?**

Armed with our “life categories” related to sexual abuse, we can begin to “browse” Scripture, even mentally. What passages address issues like sex, sexuality, masculinity, gender, rape, incest, sexual abuse (and all the other life categories you collated)?

For example, we can list all the “texts of terror” passages in Genesis where men used and abused women (Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-16; 19:4-11; 19:30-38; 20:1-18; 21:8-21; 26:7-11; 34:1-31; 38:1-30). We can list Amnon’s rape of his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-39). These passages and many others become sources for our academic theology study.

### ➤ **Where Do I Find Similar Categories, Issues, Concepts, and Constructs in the Scriptures?**

Sometimes specific passages may not seem to address “sexual abuse.” However, Genesis 1-3 surely addresses gender, maleness, femaleness, male-female relationships, and much more, showing both God’s original design and the impact of human depravity upon each of these areas. Even concepts such as being naked and unashamed, and concepts such as being afraid because of nakedness and the resultant hiding are all vital to the development of a theology of sexual abuse counseling.

### ➤ **What Wisdom Principles Address Similar Categories, Issues, Concepts, and Constructs?**

As previously noted, one way to “categorize” questions to be addressed is to use:

- ✓ The **Theology of Existence** Categories: Creation, fall, and redemption (CFR),
- ✓ The **Theology of Image Bearers** Categories: Relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), relational, rational, volitional, emotional, and physical (RRVEP), and
- ✓ The **Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction** Categories: Sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding (SHRG).

Once again, the task at hand in this stage is simply to raise questions—to develop biblically astute concepts and real life wisdom categories that we will take to God’s Word. Consider some examples of prompting exploratory questions for sexual abuse that we might develop under the theology of existence CFR categories:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Kellemen, *Soul Physicians*, 131-150, 215-289.

- **Be Pondering Creation/People: “How did God originally design us to function in this area?”** As sexual beings? As gendered beings? As males? As females? What does it mean to be naked and unashamed? What is soul shalom? Sexual shalom? Where in Scripture are these questions addressed?
- **Be Pondering Fall/Problems: “How has sin marred our functioning in this area?”** As sexual beings? As gendered beings? As males? As females? What is shame? Nakedness? Hiding? Self-covering? Why are there so many texts of terror in Genesis—what is God trying to tell us about the impact of sin upon sex and sexuality?
- **Be Pondering Redemption/Solutions: “How has redemption provided us victory in this area?”** What is the process of movement toward mature biblical maleness? Femaleness? Forgiveness? Moving from shame to shalom? Confrontation? Reconciliation? Justice? Where in Scripture are these questions addressed?

Consider some examples of prompting exploratory questions for sexual abuse that we might develop under the theology of image bearers RRVEP categories.<sup>9</sup>

- **Be Pondering Relational Beings: “What does the Bible teach about relational beings in this area?”** How do godly lovers (creation), false lovers (fall), and grace lovers (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? How did God design our longings, desires, thirsts, and affections? How does sexual abuse mar our longings, desires, thirsts, and affections? How does redemption help us to put off ungodly and put on godly longings, desires, thirsts, and affections in response to sexual abuse?
  - ✓ **Be Pondering Spiritual Beings: “What does the Bible teach about spiritual beings in this area?”** How does sexual abuse impact a person’s image of God as Father? Image of Christ? Image of the Spirit? Longings for God? Prayer life? Application of Scripture?
  - ✓ **Be Pondering Social Beings: “What does the Bible teach about social beings in this area?”** How does sexual abuse impact a person’s social relationships—to the abuser, to non-abusers, to members of the same sex, of the opposite sex?
  - ✓ **Be Pondering Self-Aware Beings: “What does the Bible teach about self-aware beings in this area?”** How does sexual abuse impact one’s sense of self? One’s identity in Christ? One’s Christ-esteem and Christ-image? Sense of shame/shalom? Sense of guilt/worth/blame? One’s gender identity?
- **Be Pondering Rational Beings: “What does the Bible teach about rational beings in this area?”** How do godly mindsets (creation), foolish mindsets (fall), and wise mindsets (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What images of God, others, self, and life develop in the core of the mind as a result of sexual abuse and how can they be renewed? What ideas/beliefs/convictions about life develop in the core of the mind as a result of sexual abuse and how can they be renewed?
- **Be Pondering Volitional Beings: “What does the Bible teach about volitional beings in this area?”** How do godly pathways/purposes (creation), self-centered pathways/purposes (fall), and other-centered pathways/purposes (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What ungodly styles of relating, goals, motives/motivations, purposes, behaviors, actions, and interactions develop as a result of sexual abuse and how can they be rehabilitated through spiritual disciplines, soul care, spiritual direction, and spiritual friendship?
- **Be Pondering Emotional Beings: “What does the Bible teach about emotional beings in this area?”** How do godly mood states (creation), ungoverned mood states (fall), and managed mood states (redemption) respond to sexual abuse? What ungodly ways of handling emotions develop as a result of sexual abuse and how can emotions be comforted by the Father, be soothed in Christ, and be healed by the Spirit?

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<sup>9</sup>See Kellemen, *Soul Physicians*, 150-213.

- **Be Pondering Physical Beings: “What does the Bible teach about physical beings in this area?”** How is God’s original design for the mind/body connection distorted by sexual abuse? How can a sexual abuse victim learn once again to yield the members of the body to God as an act of worship?

Consider some examples of prompting exploratory questions for sexual abuse that we might develop under the theology of soul care and spiritual direction SHRG categories:<sup>10</sup>

- **Be Pondering Sustaining: “In this area, what would it look like to *sustain* someone and help them to know that it’s normal to hurt?”** What is the “hurt” of sexual abuse? How do I empathize with the pain of sexual abuse? How does the Spirit comfort the agony and shame of sexual abuse?
- **Be Pondering Healing: “In this area, what would it look like to *heal* someone and help them to know that it’s possible to hope?”** What is “healing” and “recovery” from sexual abuse? What does it look like as an RRVEP being? How can I bring biblical encouragement without being trite? How do spiritual eyes/faith eyes look at and re-interpret sexual abuse from God’s perspective?
- **Be Pondering Reconciling: “In this area, what would it look like to *reconcile* someone and help them to know that it’s horrible to sin and wonderful to be forgiven?”** What are sinful responses to sexual abuse (not being guilty of being abused, but responding to the abuse in non-God ways)? How do I expose sinful responses without “victimizing the victim”? What does forgiveness of the abuser look like? How is it different from forgetting? What role should restitution and justice play?
- **Be Pondering Guiding: “In this area, what would it look like to *guide* someone and help them to know that it’s supernatural to mature?”** What is spiritual maturity as an RRVEP being for a sexual abuse victim? What spiritual processes can help the sexual abuse victim to tap into Christ’s resurrection power to become more like Jesus?

### **Explore the Scriptures by Taking Your Real Life Questions to God’s Word: Relate God’s Truth to Human Relationships**

Everything to this point has been important, but preliminary. Armed now with a clear sense of the concepts we are to study, we are ready to explore the Scriptures by taking our real life categories and questions to God’s Word—relating God’s truth to human relationships.

Using the hermeneutical spiral specifically for sexual abuse counseling, we exegete the Scriptures regarding sexual abuse using the following guide (not strait jacket):

- *Academic Theology*: Foundation—Information/Knowledge  
“What?”: Content and Conviction—Revealed Truth
  - ✓ Systematic Theology
  - ✓ Biblical Theology
  - ✓ Exegetical Theology
  - ✓ Lexical Theology
  - ✓ Textual Theology
- *Spiritual Theology*: Formation—Transformation/Wisdom  
“So What?”: Connection, Categories, and Constructs—Relevance
- *Practical/Pastoral Theology*: Friendship—Application/Love  
“What Now?”: Competence, Care, and Cure—Relationship
- *Historical Theology*: Forebearers—Validation/Confirmation  
“What Then?”: Church History and Contributions of Predecessors  
“Who Else?”: Current Theology and Contributions of Contemporaries

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<sup>10</sup>See Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends*, 83-353.

As already stated, there is no “magic” to the order in which these types of theology are presented or studied. In reality, they can and should be integrated.

Related specifically to the categories of academic theology, some might contend for systematics to follow after biblical, exegetical, and lexical theology. I won’t quibble—as long as each component is valued for its contribution to the development of an exegetical theology of biblical counseling.

Personally, sometimes I find it “easier” to move from the big picture/overview of systematic theology to the increasingly more defined and refined smaller picture of biblical theology. Other times, I find it more logical to move from lexical, exegetical, and biblical theology and then to build from there the broader systematic theology perspective.

### **Academic Theology: Foundation—Information/Knowledge (The “What?” Question: Content and Conviction—Revealed Truth)**

The use of the word “academic” in academic theology should *not* be construed to mean that such theology is a theology only of the head and not of the heart also. I have chosen this word (academic) to highlight the vital necessity of the truth (content, information, knowledge) component of biblical counseling. The Apostle Paul said it best when he prayed that our love would abound more and more in *knowledge and depth of insight* (Phil. 1:9).

### ***Systematic Theology***

Systematic theology involves the orderly arrangement of everything the Bible has to say about a given topic. For instance, with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), systematic theology traces God’s inspired teaching on the Spirit from Genesis 1:2 (the Spirit brooding over the waters) to Revelation 22:17 (the Spirit inviting all who are thirsty to come drink from the water of life), and everything in between.

With sexual abuse counseling, we explore this theme/topic/issue systematically throughout the Scriptures, organizing God’s teaching on this construct. We use all the categories we collated and all the questions we probed, pondered, and raised in the preliminary step, taking those to God’s Word.

One of the values of this systematic approach to a biblical counseling topic is the saturation of our mind with the theme. Another value, especially if we choose to “start” with systematic theology, is the ability to trace God’s thinking on related issues from cover to cover. It allows us as biblical researchers to record passages to return to in order to do the lexical, exegetical, and biblical theology work later in more depth.

Some of the many broad questions with systematic theology that we might ask, *and now seek to answer*, include but certainly are not limited to:

- What is the Bible’s mood regarding sexual abuse? How is it regarded? How does it relate to the overarching theme of Scripture? How does the author regard it? The characters? God? What principles do I discover? How did God design us to function as gendered beings? How did God design us to function sexually? How has sin marred our maleness and femaleness? What impact does redemption have on sexual abuse recovery? How do we function as relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings relative to sexual abuse? In the Bible, how are people who have been sexually abused sustained, healed, reconciled, and guided?

Another strength of the systematic theology approach to biblical counseling is the ability to trace themes across the breadth of Scripture. Not every passage of Scripture screams “text of terror!” Or, “sexual abuse!” However, a great deal of Scripture, examined systematically, addresses life issues relative

to sexual abuse. For example, in examining sexual abuse concepts systematically, one might explore the entire Bible's teaching on issues such as:

- Shame. Shalom. Maleness. Femaleness. Male/female relationship. Same sex attraction. Gender. Sexuality. Voice and voicelessness. Power and powerlessness. Forgiveness. Restitution. Reconciliation. Confrontation. Grace. Healing. Sense of self. Self-awareness. Longings, desires, and affections. Self-sufficiency. Hiding. Self-protection. Comfort. Evil. Satanic temptation. Image of God. Putting off. Putting on.

### ***Biblical Theology***

Biblical theology, as I am using it here, involves exploring a theme, topic, issue, or question as developed in one biblical book, or by one biblical author, or even chronologically through the history of the text. With pneumatology, for instance, we might study all of the Apostle John's writing on the Holy Spirit—moving from John's Gospel, to 1, 2, and 3 John, and to Revelation. What theology of the Spirit does John present? How do we understand it and apply it to our lives and ministries?

With sexual abuse recovery, we bring all our questions, concepts, and constructs related to this issue to one biblical book or author (theoretically one can do this for every book/author in Scripture). For instance, we might study only Genesis, or we might study all five books of the Pentateuch (authored by Moses). If studying Genesis, the aforementioned "texts of terror" where women are raped, abused, and controlled could be powerful passages to examine. And we could explore throughout Genesis concepts previously mentioned: gender, shame, shalom, maleness, femaleness, etc. (see below for further examples).

The key with biblical theology and biblical counseling issues is to saturate our mind with *the text in context*. Ask similar questions to those listed under systematic theology, but through the eyes of one author, one book, and with continual reference to the setting/purpose of the book and the culture of the day.

Some of the many broad questions with biblical theology that we might ask, *and now seek to answer*, include but certainly are not limited to:

- What is the book's mood regarding sexual abuse? How is it viewed? How does it relate to the overarching theme of the book? How does the author regard it? The characters? God? What principles do I discover about sexual abuse and related issues in this book/this author? According to this book/author, how did God design us to function sexually? How has sin marred our functioning as males and females according to this book/author? What impact does redemption have in healing from abuse according to this book/author? In this book, how do we function as relational (spiritual, social, self-aware), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings? According to this author, how are people sustained, healed, reconciled, and guided when abused?

As with systematic theology, in biblical theology we can study concepts, constructs, and real life issues related to sexual abuse within the context of a book/author. When studying Genesis, for instance, we might explore issues such as:

- Why didn't Adam, who was given the command to guard the garden, guard Eve? How does this relate to a woman who has been abused by a male relative? How does it relate to a male or female who tells adults of abuse but whose concerns are never heard? How did Hagar experience being forced to bear a child for Sarai and Abram (Genesis 16)? How did she experience being mistreated by Sarai? Hagar was seen and heard by no one but God. How did she find healing in being seen and

heard by God and how could that relate to sexual abuse recovery? How does the Genesis theme of shalom, shame, nakedness, and hiding possibly relate to issues of sexual abuse recovery? Why does Genesis, among all books of the Bible, have so many texts of terror? What are we to make of this theme in Genesis as it relates to human depravity and deprivation?

### *Exegetical Theology*

Exegetical theology, as I am using it here, involves examining our theme, topic, issue, and questions in key texts by using principles of hermeneutics and methods of Bible study to understand God's teaching regarding this concept/construct. Obviously, in terms of the relationship between exegetical theology and biblical/systematic theology, one truly can't do biblical/systematic theology apart from doing exegetical work. That is another reason why the "order" of these types of academic theology is not the main point. The point emphasized is the necessity of being able to do, and then actually doing, each aspect of academic theology relative to biblical counseling issues.

With exegetical theology and pneumatology, we might choose to do in-depth exegetical work in John 14-16, studying concepts such as the Holy Spirit as the Comforter/Counselor, the guiding and teaching ministry of the Spirit, the personhood of the Spirit, the convicting ministry of the Spirit, and how all of this relates to the believer being sanctified in and by the Spirit who is our Discippler.

With exegetical theology and sexual abuse counseling, we saturate our mind with one passage, section, or pericope. We do the exegetical work of observation, interpretation, implication, and application. We seek to analyze the details of the passage while synthesizing the overall purpose of the passage. We ask similar broad questions to those suggested under systematic and biblical theology.

Specific questions we can raise for exegetical theology and sexual abuse recovery can be illustrated using 2 Samuel 13 and the rape of Tamar by her half-brother, the foolish, selfish, wicked, Amnon, and the non-involvement of Tamar's father David, the unhelpful, unhealthy, and unholy involvement of her brother Absalom, the ungodly counsel of Amnon's "friend" Jonadab, the courageous, bold, wise responses of Tamar herself, the shaping of the pericope by the author, and the inspired voice of God heard in this passage. The rather lengthy sample that follows is only a speck of the possible exegetical work that can be done with this one text as it relates to sexual abuse recovery.

- How does the opening phrase, "in the course of time," set the broader context for the purpose of this passage in this book? How does David's preceding sexual sin and murder (just two chapters earlier) assist in understanding the purpose for the inclusion of this passage in inspired Scripture? What is God wanting us to learn about life, fallen human nature, abuse of power, etc.? How are we to interpret Amnon's "falling in love"? How is Tamar's beauty used against her and what impact might this have upon her sense of self? How should Amnon have handled his "frustration" and depression ("haggard")? How should Jonadab have counseled his friend? Why the repeated use of "love" and "do"? How does the repeated use of "my sister" and "my brother" impact our interpretation and application of this passage? Where did Tamar, especially given the culture of her day, find the strength to speak (find and keep her voice and power) so forcefully about the foolish, wicked nature of Amnon's attitude and actions? How did she find the bold love to force him to ponder the personal consequences of his sinfulness? How does his refusal to listen to her (repeated in the text several times) relate to the voicelessness of sexual abuse victims? How does his forcing her because he was stronger than her relate to the powerlessness of sexual abuse victims? Why did Amnon then hate her so? What do we make of this? How did his calling her "this woman" (in the Hebrew it is simply "this") impact her shame and false guilt? How did his bolting the door against her impact her sense of shame (blaming the victim)? What does Tamar's ritual grieving (appropriate for the culture of her day) suggest about helping sexual abuse victims to face their grief candidly? How might Absalom's

“counsel” to “be quiet” (another case of voicelessness) and “don’t take this thing to heart” work against her full grieving? What, by Absalom’s negative example, can we learn about sustaining and healing a sexual abuse victim? What does it mean that Tamar lived a desolate woman and how might this relate to sexual abuse victims today? What do we make of David being furious but inactive? What do we make of Absalom’s anger, hatred, and eventual murder in terms of family members’ responses to the disgrace of sexual abuse? What do we make of David grieving the death of Amnon while never grieving the rape of Tamar?

### ***Lexical Theology***

Lexical theology, as I am using it here, involves examining our theme, topic, and questions by exploring the cultural and biblical meanings and uses of key words related to this issue. (Of course, we must keep in mind all the lexical fallacies noted by Barr and others. However, the fact that shoddy lexical work can be done should never discourage us from doing meticulous lexical theology.<sup>11</sup>)

With lexical theology and pneumatology, we could study key words in John 14-16. Those might include the Greek words behind “another,” “Counselor,” “forever,” “orphans,” “teach,” “remind,” “peace,” “Spirit of truth,” “testify,” “grief,” “convict,” “guilt,” “sin,” “righteousness,” “judgment,” “bear,” “guide in all truth,” “speak on his own,” “bring glory,” and “making it known.”

With lexical theology and sexual abuse counseling, we want to perform detailed studies of key words, textual markers, repeated phrases, and lexical patterns used in the passage we are examining. Study the meaning of the words in the culture of the day. Study how that author used that word in that book and section. Examine the meaning and usage of that word by that author and other biblical authors. Explore how the words describe God’s viewpoint. The perpetrator’s viewpoint. The victim’s viewpoint. The author’s viewpoint. Ponder what the words suggest about God’s design, human depravity, the damage done, and Christ’s grace for our disgrace. Probe what the words suggest about sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding for sexual abuse.

Specific lexical work can be illustrated using 2 Samuel 13.

- What does “fell in love with” mean and imply? Why did the author include “beautiful” in describing Tamar? What do “frustrated” and “haggard” mean relative to Amnon? How are we to interpret the author’s use of “shrewd” to describe Jonadab the evil counselor? What is the force of “grabbed”? What is the force of “don’t”? What is the meaning of “force”? Why did Tamar choose the phrase “such a thing should not be done in Israel”? What might the cultural context be for this phrase? The cultural meaning? What do we make of the repeated use of “don’t”? What is the meaning of “wicked”? How does this meaning help us to conceptualize the evil of sexual abuse? What did Tamar mean by “what about me”? What did she mean by “how could I get rid of my disgrace”? Culturally, what did this imply? How can “disgrace” help us to understand the hideous consequence of sexual abuse? What did Tamar mean by “what about you”? What does “wicked fools in Israel” mean and what does it say about the evils of sexual abuse? How do these words from Tamar help us to glimpse the human author’s and the divine Author’s view of sexual abuse? What does “he refused to listen” mean and imply? What does “he was stronger than she, he raped her” mean and imply then and now? What does “he hated her with intense hatred” mean and imply? What does the curt, “get up and get out” mean and imply? What does the repeated use of “he refused to listen to her” mean and imply? What does “weeping aloud” say about grieving sexual abuse? What does “be quiet” mean and imply? What does “don’t take this thing to heart” mean and imply? Is Absalom’s hate the same word for Amnon’s hate? Is Absalom’s word for “disgrace” the same as Tamar’s word for it?

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<sup>11</sup>James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

## *Textual Theology*

By textual theology, I am describing a bridge between academic theology and spiritual theology. In textual theology, we stop. Think. Ponder. Connect the dots. Synthesize.

Far too often the proverbial “missing the forest for the trees” can occur with typical academic theology. Contextual theology helps us to relate our findings together. What have we seen? What do we make of this? What preliminary principles and patterns are we starting to sense?

With pneumatology and textual theology, one might conclude the study of John 14-16 with a summary that the Holy Spirit is our divine Mentor, Coach, Counselor, and Discipler. Out of that big picture, many specific interpretations and applications could begin to flow with spiritual theology and practical theology.

With sexual abuse counseling and textual theology, various big picture conclusions might arise. For instance, with the plethora of texts of terror in Genesis, one might begin to surmise that one result of the fall is Satan’s ongoing attack on Trinitarian image bearers. We are *male and female* image bearers, and sexual abuse attacks the core of our masculinity and femininity. Our sin, including sexual sin, which is sin against the body and against the soul (a soul that is a feminine or masculine soul) causes alienation from God, separation from one another, and dis-integration from self. Genesis, with its repeated portrait of men abusing women, reminds us that the fall attacked the core of our relational self—as spiritual beings, social beings, and self-aware beings. Out of that one big picture, many specific interpretations, personal applications, and ministry implications could begin to arise with spiritual theology and practical theology.

## **Spiritual Theology: Formation—Transformation/Wisdom (The “So What?” Question: Connection, Categories and Constructs—Relevance)**

In academic theology, we ask the “What?” question. “What does the text say about this issue, about sexual abuse counseling?” In spiritual theology, we ask the “So what?” question. “So what difference does all my systematic, biblical, exegetical, lexical, and textual theology work make in real life as I counsel a sexual abuse victim?”

Frankly, spiritual theology is a missing step in much current theology. Some theologians do, unfortunately, at times match the stereotype of stopping at facts and missing life. They uncover truth, but fail to relate that truth to life.

At the same time, some biblical counselors might be tempted to skip academic theology and move directly into spiritual theology. The frantic desire to help, to care, to be loving—to speak the truth in love—can motivate some to miss the truth. The result is spiritualizing and psychologizing the text; it is *not* spiritual theology. Spiritual theology builds upon the foundation of academic theology. Once we lay the foundation securely, then there are some basic processes we can move through to develop a spiritual theology of any life issue.

### ***Ask Relevant, Relational Questions***

Ask relevant, relational questions of the text, and of the data from the text derived from academic theology.

- What was it like for Tamar to experience her brother’s brutality? His hatred? His betrayal? What might have happened had Amnon’s friend provided godly counsel? Why did David remain angry yet inactive? What was it like for Tamar to remain silent in Absalom’s home? In her culture, what was her shame like? What might have brought her healing? How might these insights into the biblical text

translate to insights for living today? What biblical counseling principles might be suggested by these insights?

### ***Use Your Imagination: Utilize Relevant Biblical Language***

Often we speak of “making the Bible relevant.” The Bible *is* relevant. We make it boring and irrelevant. We need to translate our academic theology categories back into the real and raw language of Scripture. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What powerful images have the scriptural authors used? What effective word pictures can I use to translate those images to our post-modern times? How can I creatively capture what I have learned about this issue?

### ***Develop Biblical Categories***

We entered academic theology armed with some preliminary categories. By using the hermeneutical spiral, those categories morph, grow, and deepen. Some possible sexual abuse categories from our academic theology might include:

- Gender. Shame. Betrayal. Silence. Voicelessness. Powerlessness. Inactivity. Revenge. Maleness. Femaleness. Ungodly counsel. Anger. Love/lust. Love/hatred. Objectification of women. Beauty for ashes. Sexual bondage.

### ***Explain the Data of People’s Lives Using the Biblical Categories***

This final stage of spiritual theology begins to pave the way for transitioning into practical/pastoral theology. We now want to make use of our relevant, creative, real, raw biblical categories and relate them to the hurting person we are counseling.

- How does my understanding of her shame, of her sexual identity as a female, of her self-trust, help me to understand her? How does my understanding of biblical gender and maleness help me to direct her to God for healing? How does my understanding of self-protective covering and hiding help me to expose any lies she is believing? How does my understanding of biblical reconciliation help me to empower her to forgive graciously and love boldly?

### **Practical/Pastoral Theology: Friendship—Application/Love (The “What Now?” Question: Competence, Care, and Cure—Relationship)**

Historically, the great soul physicians of the past developed and followed manuals of care. In fact, many of these were handed down from generation to generation.<sup>12</sup> This accrual of communal wisdom about life has been lost in recent generations. Our manuals of pastoral care today tend to stem more from secular psychological theory than from academic and spiritual theology.

Practical or pastoral theology addresses the “What now?” question. It asks, “Given the truth related to life that I have uncovered in academic and spiritual theology, what do I do with it now? What difference does it make for me today as I minister to a sexual abuse victim?” Pastoral theology translates

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<sup>12</sup>See E. Brook Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1983. Also see Thomas Oden, *Classical Pastoral Care*. Vol. 3: “Pastoral Counsel.” Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987.

content to competence. It moves from academic and spiritual theology to spiritual friendship. It applies truth to life by speaking the truth in love through relationship informed by depth of insight (Phil. 1:9-11).

The theories we develop and the models we build in this “stage” are still *preliminary*. In the next stage we turn to historical theology. Theoretically, historical theology could “go before” pastoral/practical theology. In fact, we will build the “final” pastoral/practical theology model after considering the implications of past theologians, current theologians, and current research and wisdom.

However, I have found that it is helpful for several reasons to develop a preliminary theological and methodological model before examining church history and current thinking. First, too little fresh work is being done today and it is all too tempting to let the work of others in the past or present cloud our thinking or even stop thinking altogether. Why should we do all the academic and spiritual theology work only to jettison it to allow someone else’s idea to take precedence? Of course, the opposite danger is to put too much stock in our own work and to ignore the past and current accrued communal wisdom—a problem addressed by subsequent stages.

Second, it is important to develop preliminary pastoral theology categories so that we can *test* them against past and current theological findings and psychological research. We are better prepared to engage intelligently the works of others *if* we have formulated our own biblical theory and practice.

### ***State Your Preliminary Theological Diagnosis: Creation, Fall, and Redemption***

At this stage, we organize our academic and spiritual theology work. We can use the creation, fall, and redemption *theology of existence* motif integrated with the relational, rational, volitional, emotional, and physical *theology of image bearers* motif as one presentation model.

We can ask and begin to answer the following question. Based upon our biblical findings, what preliminary biblical psychology model (creation/people, fall/problems, redemption/solutions) can we propose that relates to the issue of sexual abuse recovery?

#### ➤ **CFR Relationally: Spiritual, Social, Self-Aware—Affections**

We will want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, and redemption of our *relational* nature as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of the human soul relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design spiritually, socially, and as a self-aware being? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification (growth in grace) relate to mature responses as a spiritual, social, and self-aware victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim become a victor in Christ? How does Christ’s grace heal the disgrace of sexual abuse? How does a sexual abuse victim see God as a protective heavenly Father if their earthly father perpetrated the sexual abuse (spiritual being)? How does a sexual abuse victim begin to trust others again when betrayed by one who should have been most trustworthy (social being)? How can a sexual abuse victim begin to find shalom when they have been shamed (self-aware being)? How are our affections, longings, thirsts, and desires further depraved and deprived by sexual abuse and how are they purified and made alive again by spiritual care?

#### ➤ **CFR Rationally: Images and Ideas—Mindsets**

We will want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, and redemption of our *rational* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of the human mind relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a rational being who thinks in images and ideas? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification (growth in grace) relate to mature mind renewal as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the

victim of sexual abuse see them self as a child of God—a saint and a son/daughter? How does Christ’s truth heal the evil deceits and satanic lies associated with sexual abuse? How does a sexual abuse victim see life—past, present, and future, from God’s perspective? How are our mindsets further depraved and deprived by sexual abuse and how are they renewed and restored by spiritual eyesight?

➤ **CFR Volitionally: Purposes/Goals/Motivations and Actions/Behaviors—Pathways**

We will want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, and redemption of our *volitional* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of the human will relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a volitional being who purposes and acts with pathways of motivation and behavior? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification (growth in grace) relate to mature motivations, interactions, and actions as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse choose to love again, trust again? How does the Holy Spirit’s power enable a sexual abuse victim to love boldly and confront graciously? How does a sexual abuse victim choose life again—choosing to live a God-sufficient, other-centered, non-self-protective life? How are our pathways of motivation and actions further depraved and deprived by sexual abuse and how are they rerouted and re-rooted by spiritual disciplines?

➤ **CFR Emotionally: Responses and Reactions—Mood States**

We will want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, and redemption of our *emotional* capacities as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of human emotions relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as an emotional being who responds internally to pathways, mindsets, and affections and who reacts externally to life experiences? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification (growth in grace) relate to mature emotional responses and reactions as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse learn emotional intelligence, soothing the soul in the Savior, godly mood management, and spiritual governing of emotions? How does the Father’s comfort heal the damaged emotions of a sexual abuse victim? How does a sexual abuse victim choose to feel again? How are our mood states further depraved and deprived by sexual abuse and how are they rewired and re-tooled by spiritual disciplines?

➤ **CFR Physically: Habituated Tendencies**

We will want to ask and begin to answer relevant life questions related to the creation, fall, and redemption of our *physical* nature as impacted by sexual abuse. How does God’s original design of humans as physical beings relate to the issue of sexual abuse? How does sexual abuse mar that design as a physical being whose body and soul are united, who is one holistic “person,” and whose body/soul complex has been abused? How does our redemption in Christ and principles of progressive sanctification (growth in grace) relate to the mature yielding of the members of the body (Romans 6) to God as a victim of sexual abuse? How does the victim of sexual abuse learn to be a pure sexual being? How does a victim of sexual abuse learn to be a mature male or female? How are our physical habituated tendencies further damaged by sexual abuse and how are they re-energized and re-connected to Christ’s resurrection power?

## ***Outline Your Preliminary Methodological Treatment Plan: Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding***

We can use the *theology of soul care* (sustaining and healing) and *spiritual direction* (reconciling and guiding) motif as one way to organize our treatment plan. Based upon our biblical findings, what preliminary biblical counseling model can we propose that relates to the issue of sexual abuse recovery?

### ➤ **Outline Sustaining Intervention Implications**

We will want to propose how to provide *sustaining* soul care for the sexual abuse victim. We will want to ask and begin to answer questions such as the following. How do I courageously enter the black hole of sexual/gender<sup>13</sup> abuse victims redirecting them to Christ and the Body of Christ? How do I sustain the sexual/gender abuse victim's faith, hope, and love so he/she experiences comfort from Christ and communion with Christ? How do I empathize with the sexual/gender abuse victim so she/he knows it's normal to experience doubts, despair, disgrace, and desolation? How do I listen to the sexual/gender abuse victim's voice? How do I hear the sexual/gender abuse victim's earthly story of disgrace? How do I enter the agony? How do I explore the sexual/gender abuse victim's current painful perspective? How do I climb in the sexual/gender abuse victim's casket of darkness?

### ➤ **Outline Healing Intervention Implications**

We will want to propose how to provide *healing* soul care for the sexual/gender abuse victim. We will want to ask and begin to answer questions such as the following. How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to find grace—God's prescription for their disgrace? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to perceive that God is caring even when people are horrendous? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim once again to experience faith, hope, love, and wholeness? How do we listen together for and to God's voice? How do we hear and apply God's eternal story of grace? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to embrace God who hears, sees, and embraces him or her? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to explore a renewed faith perspective? How can I be a champion who celebrates the resurrection with the sexual/gender abuse victim?

### ➤ **Outline Reconciling Intervention Implications**

We will want to propose how to provide *reconciling* spiritual direction for the sexual/gender abuse victim. We will want to ask and begin to answer questions such as the following. How do I gently and lovingly expose any possible self-protective, sinful responses to sexual/gender abuse? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to see that God is gracious and forgiving even when he or she clothes, covers, runs, and hides? How do I provide loving wisdom that reconciles the sexual/gender abuse victim to become a victor in Christ who faces nakedness, rejects coverings, receives God's garments, and finds beauty for ashes so he or she can offer Christlike love to a desolate world? How do I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to become a victor in Christ who confesses that it is horrible to run from God, but wonderful to return to celebrate His grace, and awesome to share His forgiveness?

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<sup>13</sup>After years of working through the hermeneutical spiral for sexual abuse counseling, I have come to the conviction that "gender abuse" is a biblical counseling category that captures what we call "sexual abuse." I develop this concept more in the final section of this paper.

## ➤ Outline Guiding Intervention Implications

We will want to propose how to provide *guiding* spiritual direction for the sexual/gender abuse victim. We will want to ask and begin to answer questions such as the following. How do I understand and describe the spiritual dynamics of shame and self-covering to expose root causes that the sexual/gender abuse victim can put off to become a victor in Christ who puts on God-sufficiency and other-centered living/loving? What will mature love look like for this person as he or she moves from victim to victor? How can I help the sexual/gender abuse victim to move to victor in Christ by cooperating with God’s supernatural resurrection power in creating beauty for ashes? How can I empower the sexual/gender abuse victim to be a victor who trusts God and takes risks for God?

### Examine Past and Current Biblical Research on This Topic: Use the Wisdom of Others

The Holy Spirit has a history. History, as has been said, is His-Story. While we would be *lazy* if we avoided doing our own hard work of academic, spiritual, and pastoral theology; we would be *arrogant* if we avoided studying the contributions of others. In this section, I suggest not only that we examine church history and past biblical research on sexual abuse, but also that we explore contemporaries in the discussion. For the sake of brevity, I will highlight those in the past under the header of “historical theology,” and I will only briefly outline how to engage the contributions of those in the present.

### Historical Theology: Forbearers—Validation (The “What Then?” Question: Contributions of Predecessors)

We are not alone. We are not the first generation, by any means, to explore the Scriptures to develop biblical models of soul care and spiritual direction. It is sometimes surprising to some when they discover the depth and seriousness of issues that saints of the past have faced in their lives and ministries. While their categories and labels lack modernistic underpinnings, they have dealt with what we would now call schizophrenia, clinical depression, anxiety, panic, and so much more.<sup>14</sup>

If my findings have *no* support in church history, then I will want to ponder why this is. If my findings are contradicted by church history, then I will want to re-examine my conclusions. While Scripture is inspired, *my interpretations and applications of Scripture are not inspired*. Church history is not being placed on a par with Scripture. Tradition is not being placed on a par with Scripture. The wisdom of that great cloud of witnesses *is* being placed on par (and above) my own wisdom.

As we explore the contributions of select predecessors in church history who studied this topic, we want to analyze this data in light of our biblical interpretations (which is why I suggested that this current stage wait until now). As we analyze the data, we will want to do the following.

## ➤ Discern What Further Questions Are Suggested That We May Want to Take Back to the Text for Further Study

- ✓ Ask, “In Light of My Study of Church History, What New Issues Do I Need to Study?”
- ✓ Ask, “What Findings Contradict My Biblical Interpretations?”
  1. Do These Suggest Any Faulting Interpretations on My Part?
  2. Do These Suggest Any Faulting Interpretations on Their Part?

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<sup>14</sup>For an examination of the many “clinical” issues Christian women have dealt with, see Robert Kellemen and Susan Ellis, *Sacred Friendships: Celebrating the Legacy of Women Heroes of the Faith*. Winona Lake, BMH Books, 2009. For Martin Luther’s work in “clinical” issues, see Robert Kellemen, “Spiritual Care in Historical Perspective: Martin Luther as a Case Study in Christian Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding.” Ph.D. Dissertation, Kent State University, 1997.

- ✓ Ask, “What Findings Confirm My Biblical Interpretations?”

➤ **Determine What to Alter in Our Views**

- ✓ Ask, “What Do I Want to ‘Re-study’?”
- ✓ Ask, “What Might I Want to Change or Delete?”
- ✓ Ask, “What Might I Want to Add or Improve?”
- ✓ Test All These Alterations against My Interpretation of the Word

**Current Theology: Colleagues—Validation (The “Who Else?” Question: Contributions of Contemporaries)**

Just as others before us have studied matters of the soul, so also many of our colleagues are doing the same today. It would be equally arrogant for any of us to assume that we have the final word, only word, or even the best word on how to relate truth to life. Therefore, I suggest the identical model for using the contributions of our contemporaries that I suggested for using the contributions of our predecessors.

**Evaluate Psychological Research and “Proverbial Observations” Regarding This Theme/Topic:  
A Catalyst for Deep Thinking**

Wherever counselors stand on the broad, complex spectrum regarding the integration or non-integration of theology and psychology, they could implement the current section whether they were “integrationists” or “non-integrationists.” Notice the first word of the header: “evaluate.” We can bury our heads in the sand and pretend that no one is doing psychological research in the area of sexual abuse. Or, we can acknowledge the work, engage it, and evaluate it using our biblical foundation.

Further, I am also suggesting the evaluation of “psychological research.” My own convictions are that the creation mandate in Genesis 1 legitimizes the role of *descriptive psychological research* that examines and quantifies human reactions and responses. What I am suggesting by this header is that we examine and evaluate the descriptive psychological research being done regarding sexual abuse (often categorized currently under the header of post-traumatic stress disorder). I am *not*, under this header, highlighting the evaluation and examination of *prescriptive secular psychology theory* (which would be a topic for a paper on integration/non-integration).

I am also suggesting in this section that “proverbial observations” be evaluated. Christian psychologists Dan Allender and Diane Langsberg, for instance, have written on sexual abuse.<sup>15</sup> Some of their materials would “fit under” the header of biblical studies of contemporaries. Other of their writings would fit more under this current header. Based upon their lived-experience as counselors working with sexual abuse victims, they have shared their proverbial wisdom. Such writings are worthy of evaluation.

When evaluating psychological research and proverbial observations, I suggest the following methods.

➤ **Analyze This Data in Light of Our Biblical Interpretations**

- ✓ Ask, “What Further Questions Are Suggested That I May Want to Take Back to the Text for Additional Study?”

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<sup>15</sup>Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1990. Diane Langsberg, *On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999.

- ✓ What Research Findings and/or Observations Contradict My Biblical Interpretations?
  1. Ask, “Do These Suggest Any Faulting Interpretations on My Part?”
  2. Ask, “Do These Suggest Any Faulting Research or Analysis on Their Part?”
- ✓ Determine What to Alter in My Views
  1. Ask, “What Do I Want to ‘Re-study’?”
  2. Ask, “What Might I Want to Change or Delete?”
  3. Ask, “What Might I Want to Add or Improve?”
  4. Test All These Alterations against My Interpretation of the Word

### **Synthesize Your Findings: Develop a Relevant Biblical *Working* Model of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction for This Life Area**

Finally, we are ready to build a working model. Likely, we already built a substantial preliminary model after our work in academic, spiritual, and practical/pastoral theology. All that is left to do is to implement any new conclusions we have drawn after our study of church history, contemporaries, psychological research, and proverbial wisdom. As those studies sent us back to the proverbial “drawing board,” what new conclusions did we make?

Notice that even now it is a “working” model. No conclusions we make this side of heaven are final. None are *the perfect model*. Still, given all the biblical work and research, we can have confidence in our model. God has truly given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Rather than repeat an expanded list of questions and answers from the preliminary pastoral/practical theology section, I will provide an outline that suggests some final steps toward moving from our preliminary model to a working model. Additionally, so that we can see *one* working model, I have included a model (page 23) for sexual/gender abuse recovery counseling that I have developed using this process.

- **Maintain the Relevant, Raw, Real Language and Power of the Scriptures as We Collate and Present Our Findings**
  - ✓ Keep Our Convictions in View: God’s Has Given Us Everything That Pertains to Life and Godliness
  - ✓ Keep Our Purpose in View: Relating God’s Truth to Human Relationships
- **Present a Biblical Psychology of the Issue: A Creation, Fall, Redemption Biblical Psychology**
  - ✓ What Was God’s Original Design for Us in This Area? (Creation: People, Order, Design, Anthropology, Psychology)
  - ✓ How Has Sinned Marred God’s Original Design for Us in This Area? (Fall: Problems, Disorder, Depravity, Hamartiology, Psychopathology, Sufferology/Damage/Deprivation)
  - ✓ How Has Christ’s Grace Returned Us to Dignity in This Area? (Redemption: Solutions, Reorder, Dignity, Soteriology, Sancticology, Psychotherapy, Soul-u-tion)
- **Develop a Biblical Approach to Soul Care and Spiritual Direction for This Issue: A Biblical Treatment Plan**
  - ✓ What Does Biblical Sustaining Look Like As I Minister to People in This Area?
  - ✓ What Does Biblical Healing Look Like As I Minister to People in This Area?
  - ✓ What Does Biblical Reconciling Look Like As I Minister to People in This Area?
  - ✓ What Does Biblical Guiding Look Like As I Minister to People in This Area?

## A Way Forward...Together

G. K. Chesterton noted that, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”<sup>16</sup> Could the same perhaps be said for biblical counseling and Christian psychology? “The sufficiency of Scripture ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”

Have we abdicated our time-tested (two-thousand years of church history) biblical responsibility to be soul physicians who understand life from the perspective of the Author of life, who understand the creature through the words of the Creator? Have we turned either to “secular sources” or to “shallow, spiritualized answers” rather than doing the hard work of biblical exegesis for biblical counseling?

As noted at the outset, we won’t find biblical answer in a “*concordance form*”—one-problem, one-verse, one-solution. Instead, the Bible provides counsel for specific and significant soul issues in a “*concept form*.” This requires that we conceptualize problems using biblical wisdom principles that address the complexity of real and raw life as lived in a fallen and broken world.

This takes time, effort, training, work, energy, prayer, and dependence upon the Spirit. Perhaps this is why it is so seldom done. For too long we’ve told people to trust the sufficiency of Scripture, yet we’ve failed to teach people how to *view* the Bible and we’ve failed to equip people how to *use* the Bible to relate truth to life.

The thesis of this paper is clear. The Bible offers a robust, relevant, relational, and profound understanding of life issues and of a way forward toward Christ-centered, comprehensive, and compassionate care. What we need is a biblical/theological approach that provides a way of *viewing* and *using* the Bible to develop a *theology* and *methodology* of biblical counseling that addresses with compassion and wisdom the complex issues that people face. This paper is a step *toward* that goal of developing *a model of biblical exegesis for biblical counseling*. May others continue to build on it.

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<sup>16</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*. Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 1910/2010, 39.

## **Sexual/Gender Abuse Counseling: Grace—God’s Prescription for Our Disgrace**

### **Soul Care for Sexual/Gender Abuse Recovery**

- **The Horrors of Sexual/Gender Abuse That We Have Suffered**
  - **God Is Caring Even When People Are Horrendous**

*Soul care gives courageously enter the black hole with sexual/gender abuse victims redirecting them to Christ and the Body of Christ to sustain and heal their faith, hope, and love so they experience comfort from Christ and communion with Christ.*

#### ***Sustaining:* “It’s Normal to Experience Doubts, Despair, Disgrace and Desolation”**

- Listen to Your Spiritual Friend’s Voice
- Hear Your Spiritual Friend’s Earthly Story of Disgrace
  - Enter Your Spiritual Friend’s Agony
- Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Current Painful Perspective
- Be a Comforter Who Enters the Black Hole (Climbs in the Casket) (Empathy)

#### ***Healing:* “It’s Possible to Experience Faith, Hope, Love, and Wholeness”**

- Listen Together to God’s Voice
- Hear God’s Eternal Story of Grace
  - Encourage Your Spiritual Friend to Embrace God
- Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Renewed Faith Perspective
- Be a Champion Who Celebrates the Resurrection (Encouragement)

### **Spiritual Direction for Sexual/Gender Abuse Recovery**

- **The Self-Protective Evil of Our Sinful Responses to Sexual/Gender Abuse**
  - **God Is Gracious Even When I Clothe, Cover, Run, and Hide**

*Spiritual directors understand the spiritual dynamics of shame and self-covering and discern root causes of spiritual alienation, social separation, and self dis-integration, providing loving wisdom that reconciles and guides sexual/gender abuse victors to face their nakedness, reject their coverings, receive God’s garments, and find beauty for ashes so they can offer Christlike love to a desolate world.*

#### ***Reconciling:* “It’s Horrible to Run from God, Wonderful to Return to Celebrate His Grace, and Awesome to Share His Forgiveness”**

- Watch Your Spiritual Friend’s Relational Style
- Expose Your Spiritual Friend’s Earthly Story of Self-Covering
- Explore Your Spiritual Friend’s Current Protective Perspective
- Enlighten Your Spiritual Friend to Grace—Received and Given
- Be a Care-Fronter Who Risks Offense (Exposure)

#### ***Guiding:* “It’s Supernatural to Love by Cooperating with God in Creating Beauty for Ashes”**

- Look Together for God’s Renewal Process
  - See God’s Eternal Story of Grace
- Empower and Equip Your Spiritual Friend to Trust God and to Take Risks for God and Others
  - Encourage Your Spiritual Friend to Stir Up the Gifts of God
  - Be a Coach Who Trains the Heart (Empowerment)