**All Roads Lead to Calvary: Using the Gospels in Counseling**

**Introduction**

I hope you are enjoying our walk through Scripture.

* I hope you have a few passages or ideas that you really want to implement in your own counseling ministries.
* By God’s grace this session will give you another one.

Think with me. My subject matter, the gospels, comes after 70% of God’s self-disclosure has been revealed. Thus, as we think through the pages of our OT Scripture we have been a witness to an awesome story. A story that has helped us see …

* The God who is gracious and compassionate toward his people Israel despite repeated wanderings from him
* The Lord, who ultimate in wisdom, willingly gives that wisdom to those who diligently seek it
* The redeeming God who intervenes in midst of his people’s sin and allows them to sacrifice as a means of atoning for their sin
* The incomparable God who will send his servant who will give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and freedom for the captives

But our journey is far from complete.

For in the words of

**Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**

* Now is the time, the stage is set, for God to intervene through the wonderful incarnation of Jesus.
* The time has come for Messiah to deliver his people from their sins.
* The time has come for the incarnate Yahweh to appear so that “God dwells among men” … Emmanuel.

This evening we have the wonderful pleasure of sitting at the feet of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in order to rejoice in our glorious savior Jesus.

* The challenge is that we have less than an hour to allow each of these accounts to mold our thinking and our counseling.
* There is, of course, no possible way for me to cover all of the major themes, let alone the minor ones in the gospels. So inevitably, there are important themes missing from this presentation --- maybe even your favorite ones.

However, even though I have put a structure together for this session that is inherently selective.

* God willing, my selections are sensitive to the themes, concerns, and organization of all the gospel writers while also providing very practical insights for how these themes practically impact our counseling ministry.

With that in mind, I want to discuss four themes of the gospel writers that should inform both how we counsel and what we discuss in biblical or Christ-centered counseling.

**I. There is hope, joy, satisfaction, and comfort, based on the Identity OF Jesus**

The biblical counseling movement, especially the last few years, has seen a significant rise in the amount of time that counselors emphasize a believer’s union with Christ or, in the words of Paul, their “in Christ” condition.

* And Rightly so!
* But the only reason that those discussions have any value is because of the last word in those phrases “Christ.”
	+ My “in drugs” identity is not nearly as cool,
	+ My “in sex” identity does not satisfy
	+ Nor is my “in my pride” all the exciting either,
	+ And the “in my work” identity was not all that wonderful or all that helpful
* What makes our “in Christ” condition so wonderful is the Christ/Jesus part. Having union with Jesus is so awesome because Jesus is awesome.
	+ In fact, tell your neighbor, “Jesus is awesome.”
		- Respond to the crowd …. Yes, Jesus is awesome

It is his identity that gives us hope, joy, and satisfaction.

The gospel writers, 100 pages of our NT, are dedicated to helping us know the “Jesus” part of our identity because they explain in vivid detail the identity OF Jesus.

Before I get to some of the specifics, the gospels care so much about the identity of Jesus

* That Mark devotes almost 8 full chapters to answer the question “Who is Jesus?”

Luke 1:1-4 “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”

John 20:30-31 “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

The gospels specifically answer the question of “Who is Jesus” in many ways, but here are the 3 I wanted to highlight this evening.

1. **Jesus is God: The one who came to dwell among his people**

Mark 1:1-3The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2**As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,**3**the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ ”

Ironically, this quotation is not entirely from Isaiah.

* Part is Isaiah 40, the wonderful text explaining that Yahweh is the incomparable God.
* The other part is Malachi 3:1.
* Mark does not often quote from the OT, but he begins his gospel in this fashion to clearly make the connection between Yahweh and Jesus. Check out the pronouns and look at the original contexts. Mark is making a very explicit point.

**What about John?**

John 8:57-58So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” **58**Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” **59**So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Matthew also gets in the act …

Matthew 1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

**But maybe the point is best made in the story of the paralytic. You will remember that his friends carry him, take him to the roof, and lower him into the crowded home. (Mark 2:1-12, read vv. 6-12)**

* Mark 2:1-12 Who can forgive sins? Only God can do that! As a reader to the event, you are like Hello. Dude … You are exactly right.
* Only God can forgive sins. Remember chapter 1:2-3???

When I open my Scriptures and I start reading from the gospels I am comforted, encouraged, strengthened that **my Jesus** is God.

* I think that is one of the reasons that new song that has this line “My God’s not dead, he is surely alive” has struck a chord with so many people.
* My Jesus is not buried in a grave. He is alive and well in Heaven.

I have hope. I am encouraged. I can find joy. I am satisfied. I am linking arms with JESUS.

* Tell your neighbor, “Jesus is Totally Awesome!”

That is not all the gospels claim … check this out.

1. **Jesus is the Messiah: The deliverer and the redeemer of His people.**

In John 20:30-31, I write these things that you might know that Jesus is the Messiah.

What was messiah, the Christ going to do? According to Isaiah the prophet, he would give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and freedom to those who were in bondage

* Throughout the gospels the writers explain that (the 7 signs in John’s gospel in chapters 1-12, the miracle healings in Matt, Mark or Luke), Jesus continually authenticates his teaching with the signs of Isaiah.

I have to cheat for just a second … remember the sons of Sceva (yes, I know it is in Acts 19:15-16) … they want to cast out demons … READ THE TEXT … then they ran away beaten and naked [Here is a piece of advice … if you enter a fight fully clothed and you leave the fight naked … then you probably lost].

* Yet when Jesus enters these scenes, the demons ask permission.
* They cower before their creator.
* They submit, by force, to the one who is greater than they are.

The physical healings of individuals by Jesus pointed to a larger reality where those who were spiritually deaf, spiritually blind, and spiritually held captive could be release.

* That is Awesome.

It is awesome because idolatry is a really bad place to be. Did you know in Psalm 115 that God describes the idols as deaf, dumb, mute, lame, and powerless and every one who worships an idol becomes just like them?

* In other words, our idolatry leads to being deaf, dumb, mute, lame, and powerless.
* But I totally stoked that Messiah, Jesus, came to heal me of those conditions.

Praise God that Jesus is the Messiah. If we cannot get fired up about that, there is something bad wrong with us. A third identity is …

1. **Jesus is the Suffering Servant: The one who would take our punishment.**

Here is another emphasis in the biblical counseling movement. Let’s ensure we are compassionate to those who suffer. Again, praise the Lord that we are emphasizing this issue more than in the past.

The servant songs in Isaiah find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus. We learned by reading Isaiah that God’s servant would experience suffering. He would be pierced for our transgressions, he would be crushed for our iniquity, and he would carry our grief, and be despised and rejected.

* Suffer Jesus did
* Serve Jesus did

And in so doing the suffering servant of Isaiah took the wrath of God that rightly belonged to us. No passage, in my judgment speaks to this issue more than Matt 27:46.

Matthew 27:46 “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?””

* Jesus suffered physically in many, many ways, but those 3 hours on the cross there was a separation from the Father.
* The one who from eternity past had sweet fellowship, was now separated.

Friends, fellow counselors, there is a desperate need for a greater understanding of Jesus.

* The gospels are the pride of place to get those answers.
* I only scratched the surface of Jesus’ identity given in the 4 gospel accounts and yet the practical applications are almost limitless.

So Let’s ponder for a few moments some of the practical counseling observations of understanding the Identity OF Jesus.

1. Gives me hope.
	1. If Jesus can give sight to the blind, if he can grant hearing to the deaf, if he can release the demon possessed, then maybe, just maybe, Jesus can heal my marriage, Jesus can heal my broken heart, Jesus can help me love instead of hate.
	2. Right at the stage of my helplessness, it is the identity of Jesus that gives me hope that my life is not limited to the trouble of my current experience.
2. Encourages me to Love him more.
	1. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
	2. I don’t love Jesus like I need to and it is highly likely that every person who seeks my help in the counseling room does not love Jesus with ALL their heart.
	3. In the Scriptural story the way you develop a love for Jesus is get to know him (cf. Judges 2:10, Phil 3:10).
	4. I want my counselees reading about Jesus because it is as they see his love for them that they will love him in return. After all, the Scripture says, “We love him because he first loved us.”
3. Helps me get perspective in my suffering.
	1. Some of our counselees are mad at God for what they believe are injustices done to them personally. It is not like you telling them how wonderful Jesus is normally does it. [They respond … you have no idea what I have been through]
	2. Over and over and over again in Scripture those who are mad at God only receive a new perspective by running to the Lord (Psalm 73:16-17 / Psalm 63). The gospels again and again drive us back to the place where God dwelled among us.
4. Strengthens my relationship with Jesus.
	1. Many of our counselees have had a very limited relationship with God. A significant portion of the time that we ask them to hit the highlights of their life; God is nowhere in their story. In other words, Jesus is so insignificant in their life that not only do they have problems, but they don’t even consider Jesus to be a highlight of their life.
	2. How is it that these folks are really going to take a step of growth unless they are resting regularly at the feet of Jesus?

If we think of biblical counseling merely through the grid of solving a problem, then we have fallen short of the kind of ministry that Scripture is calling us to.

* In fact, it is possible, even in church ministries; to do counseling that rarely talks about Jesus.
* People need to understand the Identity OF Jesus so that they properly value and appreciate the ministry of Jesus.

How do I use the gospels in counseling?

* I teach my counselees the Identity OF Jesus so that they might have hope, so they might have joy, so they might be satisfied.
* After all, Jesus is AWESOME.

The second theme I would like to present this evening is …

**II. There is freedom, forgiveness, regeneration, and redemption based on the Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus**

This point is where the title of this message is derived. Maybe the single most obvious feature of all of the gospels is on one side of the coin the (1) lack of interest in a full life of Christ and on the other side of the coin (2) a high degree of interest in the final events of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

* Scholars argue that if you take every event in all four gospels you might have 50 days worth of Jesus’ life (and some place that number as low as 21).
* But the final few days occupy the space of Matthew 21-28, Mark 11-16, Luke 19-24, and John 13-21.
* In other words, more than 25% of all gospel material available in our Bibles focuses on the final few days of Jesus’ ministry.

Paul, in his definition of the gospel, in 1 Cor 15:3-5 recognizes this reality.

1 Cor 15:3-5 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

The gospel writers explain

* The conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment
	+ Every gospel highlights this conflict to one level or another
* The oscillation of the views of the people
	+ Where in one moment (e.g., reading Luke the inclusio of Luke 19:47-48 and 21:37-38) the people are hanging on Jesus’ every word and arising early to hear him in the temple to crying for his hanging on the tree just days later.
* The establishment of communion and the important theology of the new covenant
* The betrayal of all of his followers
* The sayings on the cross
	+ Where Jesus’ 7 sayings show the fulfillment of the suffering servant and the anguish through which our savior endured.
* The clear and concise burial arrangements
* The undeniable resurrection
	+ Matthew takes the time to record that the soldiers were paid to keep quiet and that is the story perpetuated until the current day.
* The appearances to scores of followers
	+ In fact, the gospels do not base the validity of the resurrection solely on the empty tomb. But add the numerous appearances to many people.

In other words, each gospel writer chooses to give lengthy details about the final week of Jesus’ ministry because the ultimate goal of the first coming was to defeat sin and death, and to provide a means of escape.

* To offer redemption
* To make a way for forgiveness
* To release those who believe from the power and penalty of sin.

When you read the 100+ pages (in my printing) of gospel material in one week or less what you discover is that you are taken to the cross and to the resurrection and taken to the cross and to the resurrection and taken to the cross and to the resurrection and taken to the cross and taken to the resurrection.

* In other words, the Scriptures lead you again and again to Calvary.
* They lead you again and again to the empty tomb.
* They lead you to Jesus’ resurrection appearances.
* They lead you to his ascension into glory.

If we are going to argue that repetition is one of the primary means in narrative literature that shows something is important, than the gospel writers are screaming at us.

* Take your counselee to Jesus
* Take your counselee to Jesus
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* Take your counselee to Jesus
* Let him/her stand at the foot of the cross,
* Let him hear the anguish Jesus suffers during (especially) the 6th and 9th hours,
* Let him watch as he gives up his spirit,
* Let him go with Joseph of Arimethea to the tomb,
* Let him run with the disciples to the empty tomb,
* Let him walk on the road to Emmaus where Jesus is the subject matter of the Bible.
* Let him watch Jesus ascend to heaven. (That is what Matthew does, what Mark does, what Luke does, and what John does).

Maybe we should follow their lead.

* I remember a few years ago Brad Bigney was speaking at the annual conference and he described his early years of being a counselor like that of a personal trainer … come on man 2 more, lets do 5 more and then he was thinking more like a matre D who led hurting people (through both sin and suffering) to the table where Jesus sat.
	+ That analogy was great for me because I could see myself in that too.
* I want to take you where broken people get fixed. I want to take you where your burdens, however, big, can be released. I want to take you to the person who loves you more than you can even imagine.

Friends, the cross is the place where our sin was paid. The cross is the place where you were granted freedom, forgiveness, and release from the power and penalty of sin. [Read Matthew 27:27-54]

The cross is not reserved for unbelievers only. We are free to think about and visit it often.

The implications of this to counseling are endless, but just to get the juices flowing let me suggest the following 5 applications

* Take the counselee who feels burden by the weight of their sin to the cross to unload it.
	+ There life is not happy. There is no joy. The cross is the place where those burdens can be left.
* Take the rebellious counselee who continually justifies their actions, seeks specs in others eyes (quite frankly invents them) while ignoring logs in their own.
	+ If the cross does not convict them, it is hard to imagine what would.
* Take the sufferer to the cross where they can see that if anyone has something to say about suffering then it would be Jesus.
	+ I cannot always connect with the suffering of my counselee. But I know someone who can. I know someone who knows about betrayal, innocent suffering, deep suffering, and victory.
* Take the counselee who needs hope and encouragement to the empty tomb. For maybe, just maybe, if the tomb is empty that means that Jesus is alive and well today.
* Take the counselee who has been finding joy and satisfaction in their life in all the wrong places to the D/B/R/A where joy and satisfaction reside.
	+ Maybe this is most important of all.
	+ Our married couples want to find their ultimate joy in their marriage. Inevitably, that becomes disappointing.
	+ Our singles want it in a spouse, a job, or in their friendships. This may never happen.
	+ But when people are resting in the forgiveness and freedom they have in Jesus then they are free to love, they are free to give, and they are free to live for Jesus.

Friends, Christ Centered counseling focuses again and again on the wonderful work of Jesus and encourages the counselee to develop a love for Jesus that goes far beyond the challenges and consequences that encouraged them to seek counseling.

* A fitting response is to say, “Jesus is Awesome”

A third theme of the gospels …

**III. There is a call to Heart change based on the meaning of True Righteousness**

None of us wants our counseling to be shallow.

* None of us want our counselees moving from one side of the pit in which they were living to a different part of the pit.
* We are interested in real, genuine, deep change that occurs at both the level of their behavior and at the level of their thinking/desiring.

But this kind of change is not what most of our counselees are interested in, at least initially. Instead, they want a quick fix.

Yet, the gospels remind us of the definition of true righteousness. Let’s just think about three examples …

**#1. Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)**

What Jesus does in this passage is remind all of us that adultery is not simply an act performed in the body. A person is not righteous simply because they have not committed the act of adultery.

Jesus thinks that true righteousness goes beyond the action to the lust a person has. This is a whole lot bigger.

In our own lives and in the lives our counselees we want to repent as shallow as possible, with as little pain as possible, with as little admitting as possible.

* In adultery, many times someone will admit that their adultery is wrong. They are willing to repent of the act of adultery and they want to ask forgiveness.
* But they do not understand true righteousness because if they did then they would be repenting of (1) seeking comfort in the arms of another person, (2) responding positively to the other person’s attention, (3) being open to the attention of someone else in the first place, (4) being dissatisfied at home, (5) losing your identity in Jesus so that you would lust in the first place.
* Why not repent of that?
	+ Because it is ugly. That’s why. It hurts, that’s why.
	+ It rids you of your pride and it absolutely demands that you fall at the feet of your savior Jesus and beg him to change you.
	+ It demands that you see yourself as less than you were hoping you are.

Take your counselee to Jesus and all the sudden your counselee is not so righteous anymore.

* But the other side of the coin is that Jesus is the perfect example of true righteousness and if they are believers it is that righteousness that was imputed to their accounts.

Understanding true righteousness is the path to helping your counselees come out of the pit rather than simply move to another portion in it.

**#2. Keeping your commitments (Matthew 5:33-37)**

When I was a child the big thing was finger crossing. I don’t have to keep my commitment to you because my fingers were crossed. In other words, since my fingers are crossed I have the freedom to lie to you.

* Where did we get that?

I have a young daughter and so dolls and Disney are enjoyable things for her. And I have heard of something called a pinky promise (Despicable Me). When you pinky promise then it’s legit.

The way you got the same idea done in Israel was to make a vow before God. When you made your vow you have to keep it. Which, BTW, was exactly the problem when it came to the Corban tradition (See Mark 7:1-10).

Why don’t we just go with what Jesus says in Matthew, “How about let your yes be yes and your no be no.”

Now, my wife is in the audience tonight and when she heard I was going to bring this up, she just wanted to make sure that my life insurance was paid just in case God strikes me dead for the absolute hypocrisy that I am about to commit.

Men (I mean your male counselees), have you ever said to your family I will be home at 5? Then, something came up and you did not get home until 6? Have you done that 1,000 times?

* Did you tell your son you would be at his game only to find that there was some damsel in distress or crises in the church that needed your attention … super pastor or super counselor able to solve difficult problems in a single word?
* Friends, if you commit to something then true righteousness says that you are going to fulfill it.
* I am not saying that there are NO circumstances that warrant a change, I am simply suggesting that many times when counselees seek help their words mean very little

Oh, my counselees don’t talk about pinky promises and finger crossings, but they don’t keep their word. Their yes means yes, maybe, possibly, not really, and no. Who can have a relationship when their words mean everything … and therefore nothing?

True Righteousness, according to Jesus, is learning to speak with a level of wisdom and seriousness that your words can actually be trusted. Yes = Yes and No = No.

Let me include one more picture of true righteousness before I move to the last theme tonight.

**#3. Love your enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)**

The first part of the passage is nice and sweet, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Great!

* Like the people of the day I can think about everyone that I want to put in the “neighbor” category.
* Then the people who really honk me off get a camp of their own where I can hate them.

But true righteousness goes beyond that … it involves loving your enemies. I have counseling going on right now where the people in the room are enemies. They were friends at one time, but they are friends no longer.

* Every time I simply want them to love the other (not to build their marriage or their relationship necessarily), but just to live out the gospel message in their lives they buck me. They are like, “Dude, do you know what they did to me?”
* The answer is yes, but I am asking you to live out true righteousness – the righteousness of Christ that was imputed to your account. But they are enemies.

Jesus is not impressed when you love those who love you. Unbelievers do that (even tax collectors do that).

* True Righteousness is when you love the person who hates your guts.
* True Righteousness is when you serve someone who just throws your service back in your face.
* True Righteousness is when you give something to someone who returns it just because they don’t like you.

Summary of this section

The pictures of true righteousness (scattered throughout the gospels, but focused in Matthew 5-7) show our counselees

* The problems going on in their lives are much larger than they had imagined. It is not just the behavioral issues, there are serious heart conditions and there is a serious disconnect between the counselee and Jesus.
	+ Long before they had trouble at work, long before their marriage went bad, long before they stopped relating well to their children … there was a spiritual problem between the person and Jesus.
	+ Without dealing with this, we do not give them the goal of Biblical Counseling … to please and honor God, to Love the Lord, to Delight in the Lord, and to find joy and satisfaction in our relationship with Jesus.
* On the other hand, the picture of true righteousness is absolutely wonderful. Because it shows me the way out of the pit. I am in a pit and I am not interested in moving my counselee from one part of the pit to a different part of the pit. I am interested in them coming out of the pit.
	+ Isn’t that awesome? Isn’t it a great joy to watch Jesus bring up counselees from the pit.
* These two ideas also prove to my counselees that really there is no way for me to do this on my own. Yes, I needed Jesus to save me, but I need Jesus every single moment of my existence.
	+ Here is my theme phrase for the night, “Jesus is Awesome”
	+ That is what was so outrageous about the rich young ruler’s response, “I have kept these from my youth.” Really … really. How about commandment #9 … Go sell your stuff and follow me.

To this point, the themes that I have highlighted have centered on understanding, to a greater extent, the message of the gospel. When we understand Jesus, then we also understand ourselves and our desperate need for him. But the gospel writers also take significant time to emphasize discipleship.

* They call us to live it out.
* They say, “Here is the Identity of Jesus … He is the One who sets people free, He is the one who heals blind eyes, opens deaf ears, and releases captives. He is God. He is Messiah. He is the Suffering Servant.” They say, “Jesus’ D/B/R/A was the single most important event in human history. It is the means by which freedom and forgiveness comes.” They say true righteousness is embodied in the person of Jesus. Therefore, righteousness is not just behavior, it is thinking, motives, and desires.”
* In other words, Jesus so totally rocks! Now, follow me!

That is the fourth and final theme for our evening …

**IV. There is purpose and mission through Jesus’ Commands to Discipleship**

Don’t you love having a purpose? It helps you to separate the important from the unimportant.

* We see this in sports all the time.
* Sacrifices are made in order to be in the best position to perform.

Our church is building a biblical counseling center near Purdue University. We asked our people to make a commitment. So we are saying to them … be generous in your regular giving … be generous in your capital campaign commitment … be generous in our various special projects because this puts purpose and mission to your finances.

The gospel writers say … your purpose, your mission is to be a disciple of Jesus. Just be a disciple of Jesus.

* A disciple follows Jesus and does what Jesus does (to the point that is possible)

This theme is massive and I don’t have that long to talk about it so let me narrow my discipleship focus to three elements.

**#1. Disciples of Jesus are Servants**

We know that Jesus has come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. But what the disciples needed to understand, as products of their culture, is that greatness in the God’s kingdom does not come through power and influence, but through humble service. To prove this theme Scripturally, I want you to consider with me:

* The Gospel of Mark

Earlier I mentioned that I believe Mark spends 8 chapters answering the questions of the identity of Christ. But it very interesting what he does next. This is not a Bible conference but I just can’t resist showing you this super cool observation about the literary structure of Mark.

* Walk through the 3 passion predictions, the 3 responses by the disciples, and first discipleship lesson ... on service.

In other words, when Jesus thinks about training his disciples he thinks specifically in the category of being a servant.

It is not difficult to connect this point to counseling for many of our counselees don’t serve in their homes, at the workplaces, or in their church. They orchestrate their life around the things that they like. When people agree with them, then they are happy to do something. When people do not agree with them, then they must be prepared to face their wrath.

**#2. Disciples of Jesus willingly Submit to the Word (Luke 9:23-27)**

Cross bearing has taken on all sorts of meanings through the years. But in order to properly account for the biblical data … we need to recognize that the cross was designed for shame and pain. Crucifixions were done publically in order to prove to everyone that this is what happens when you mess with Rome.

* It was forced submission to the rules and authority of Rome.
* When a person was crucified the public was put on notice that this is what happens to anyone who opposes us.

But when Jesus tells his disciples to “take up their cross daily” what he is saying is that he wants his disciples to willingly submit to the will of God.

* It is a daily act of placing yourself in submission to the word of God.

Isn’t it true that some, (many, maybe even most) of our counselees have been bucking the Word of God?

* They have been finding excuses and justifications that make it look like they are not all that bad.
* The cross bearing passages show that Jesus wants his disciples to be submissive, to view themselves under the authority of God.
	+ I love watching a counselee come to the place where they say, “I am learning that when I am submitting to the Word, that is the best place for me to be.”

Well … at some point this session has to end. I am going to add just one more picture of purpose and mission.

**#3. Disciples of Jesus are Dependent on Jesus (Mark 9:14-29)**

I don’t know about you, but every time I begin to think that I might actually know what to do with a counselee, the Lord gives me a nice little reminder.

* “Dude, you are a tool in my hand … you are a messenger … you are a mailman … you are a MatreD … you are NOT the change agent in the lives of the counselee.”

The disciples needed that lesson as well. They had been sent out and given the power over illness and demons. They return praising God for all the wonderful things they did. Then, there is this demon that they could not cast out. They were confused.

* Unfortunately, they tricked themselves into thinking that their ability (given by God) is all that was required.
* It worked before. There was a little magic formula and presto!
* What they learned is just how dependent they were on the Lord.
* I want my counselees to have hope about their problems (even to view them as resolved to a large degree),
* I want them to believe that their future is bright because they understand the Identity OF Jesus and their Identity in Jesus,
* I want them to know truths from the Word that will help respond differently than before.
* HOWEVER, I hope they never leave thinking, “I got this.”
* I want them thinking, by God’s grace I am out of the pit and now I understand how much I need Jesus every single day of my life. In other words, I am more dependent that I ever imagined.

Friends, Jesus has given us an awesome mission and purpose. Reach the World. Do so, by being like me … SERVING regardless of your position … Willingly Submissive to the Word of God … Dependent on Jesus.

**Conclusions**

Friends, the gospel accounts, as a whole, provide a rich theology needed in our biblical counseling world.

* They explain the IDENTITY OF JESUS so that we might have hope,
* They record in great detail the D/B/R/A of Jesus so that we might have freedom and forgiveness
* They record true righteousness so that we might repent in the inner man and not just in the outer man.
* They explain the nature of a disciple so that we might have a mission and purpose.

Friends, if you get nothing else, then get this. “Jesus is Awesome!” Can you please say it with me, “Jesus is Awesome!”

Let’s pray.