

## **The Godward Focus of Biblical Counseling**

By definition, the biblical counselor is one who is persuaded of and allegiant to a Christian worldview, that is, one who functions within a frame of reference that consciously sees all of the realities and relationships of life from a perspective that is biblically coherent and consistent, and thus honors the God of Scriptures. The one element of such a worldview that most dramatically distinguishes it from all pretenders is the commitment to a theocentric perspective on all of life and thought. Thus any model of counseling that is authentically biblical will be framed, designed, and executed in happy submission to the biblical demand that our lives be lived out entirely for the glory of God! In short, biblical counseling is animated by a godward focus.

The temptation today, even within the Christian community, is to do otherwise, to conduct counseling with a primary focus on someone or something other than God. But the biblical counselor must be committed to a preeminently godward focus in counseling. Why? There are three basic reasons: (1) because God demands it; (2) because the natural exaltation of self is destructive; and (3) because the soul-satisfying life God intends for His children can only be found through Jesus' spiritual paradox: deny self and focus on God.

### **THE MORAL IMPERATIVE**

Simply stated, a godward focus must be zealously maintained in biblical counseling because God demands that it be so. In one of the Old Testament's most precise articulations of the covenant-keeping nature of God, YHWH declared through the prophet Isaiah,

Thus says God the LORD,

*Who created the heavens and stretched them out,*

*Who spread out the earth and its offspring,*

*Who gives breath to the people on it,*

*And spirit to those who walk in it, ...*

*"I am the LORD, that is My name;*

*I will not give My glory to another,*

*Nor My praise to graven images." (Is. 42:5, 8)*

Later in the same section of prophecy, as YHWH foretold the mighty deliverance He would accomplish on behalf of His covenant people, He reiterated this profound reality: "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; / For how can My name be profaned? / And My glory I will not give to another" (Is. 48:11).

God, who has made Himself known in Scripture, is jealous for His own glory (Deut. 4:24). He is a sovereign God who demands that people acknowledge Him as God and honor Him as the Creator and Sovereign of all the universe. This moral imperative to honor God is most often communicated in Scripture in contexts relating to God's glory. The Hebrew term for "glory" is *chabod*, which basically means "to be heavy, weighty."<sup>1</sup> Deriving the idea of glory, dignity, or personal worth from the concept of weightiness is typical of Hebrew progression of thought. To the Semitic mind, honor or dignity could

not be reduced to a purely ideal quality; rather, those concepts depended for their significance upon the concrete concept of something “weighty in a man which gives him importance.”<sup>2</sup> Although the term *chabod* is used with various literal connotations in the Old Testament, the concept most often conveyed by the term is that of a weighty person: one who is honorable, impressive, and worthy of respect.<sup>3</sup> This connotation prevails in more than half the occurrences of the term in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the biblical notion of glory involves more than intrinsic dignity or value; it includes the visible representation of that intrinsic value. For example, *chabod* connotes not only a rich man’s dignity and standing in his community but the riches that demonstrated his dignity (livestock, silver, and gold in Gen. 13:2; the wealth Jacob carried away from Laban in Gen. 31:1);<sup>5</sup> not only the honor of the priestly office but the distinctive garments worn by the priests to manifest the dignity of their office (Ex. 28:2, 40);<sup>6</sup> not only the unique and infinite splendor and majesty of the person of YHWH, but the ineffable physical glory-cloud that testified of His covenant-keeping nature and sovereign rule in the midst of His people.<sup>7</sup> In sum, the term *chabod* speaks not only of intrinsic dignity and worth but of the external and tangible manifestation of that worth.

Thus when YHWH insists that He “will not give His glory to another” (Is. 42:3; 48:11), there is more at stake than the intrinsic worth of His sovereign person. Based on God’s use of the term *glory* in those statements, we conclude that His demand is not only that we personally acknowledge His unique dignity and infinite perfection, but that we consciously and publicly parade those majestic realities. Indeed, it is the stewardship of every child of God not only to embrace the truths that God has revealed concerning Himself but to deliberately and consistently order every aspect of life to display the grace, justice, and faithfulness of God, to whom that child belongs.<sup>8</sup>

To clarify this concept, consider how God publicly maintained His glory (that is, His reputation) in various narratives of the Old Testament. For instance, the drama of deliverance from Egypt, which culminated in the miracle of the Red Sea, was carefully framed by YHWH so that He would “be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17–18).<sup>9</sup> The ten plagues that immediately and causally preceded the Red Sea experience were so ordered and timed by YHWH that the Pharaoh gradually steeled himself to Moses’ demands. All of which prepared the way for Pharaoh’s command—a command as militarily and spiritually stupid as any in history—that his chariot forces pursue the fleeing Israelites across the miraculously dried up Red Sea. When Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters covered the Egyptians, God did indeed get glory upon Egypt. And He answered the arrogant question posed by the Pharaoh some months earlier, “Who is this YHWH that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” (Ex. 5:2). In effect, by miraculously delivering Israel from Egypt, YHWH confronted the world of that day, and of centuries to come, with the indisputable evidence of His might and His character. (Compare the reaction of Rahab in Joshua 2:9–14 and the flawed remembrance of the Red Sea evinced by the Philistines some four hundred years later in 1 Samuel 4:8.)

Again, when the southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive to Babylon, the name of YHWH was in severe jeopardy of being dishonored. God had covenanted with Israel that if they persevered in rebellion and disobedience He would cause them to be taken captive by a “nation of fierce countenance” (Deut. 28:49–57; see 1 Kin. 8:46). And yet, given the universal superstition of the time that if one nation were defeated by another it was because the gods of the victorious nation were more powerful than those of the vanquished, God’s name was in danger of being dishonored if He kept that

promise of judgment upon His covenant people. But God intervened to publicly preserve His glory through the man Daniel.

As a young man, Daniel was taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar in the first stage of Judah's deportation to Babylon (about 605 B.C., see Daniel 1). Later, God enabled Daniel to provide the content and interpretation of the Babylonian monarch's dream, but only after all of the king's pagan soothsayers had confessed their absolute inability to do so (ch. 2). Thus YHWH was publicly honored as Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the power of the God worshiped by Daniel and his friends (vv. 46–47).

Some decades later, the prophet interpreted another dream for the king. This time King Nebuchadnezzar wrote a decree to be read throughout all the kingdom that told the story of his own madness and thus honored Daniel's God as "the Most High ... who lives forever." The king's decree concluded with this encomium of praise to YHWH.

*For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,*

*And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.*

*And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,*

*But He does according to His will in the host of heaven*

*And among the inhabitants of earth;*

*And no one can ward off His hand,*

*Or say to Him, "What hast Thou done?" (Dan. 4:34–35)*

*Thus did Nebuchadnezzar publicly and universally declare the glory of YHWH.<sup>10</sup>*

The historical examples from Scripture could be multiplied, but with these the point is made: when YHWH insists He will not share His glory with another, He wants us to understand not only that He possesses such personal majesty, but also that it is His sovereign will that His majesty be publicly displayed. It is His concern and must be our concern.

### **Obedience and Fallenness**

There are profound implications in this mandate to deliberately and publicly reflect the God whom we serve. It means that the children of God are under scriptural obligation to see themselves as vehicles of God's glory, as mirrors with which the Sovereign of the universe has chosen to reflect His glory, as conduits to display Him before a watching world. It is morally imperative that believers frame their lives, order their priorities, fashion their relationships, and discipline their souls in ways appropriate to this relationship and responsibility.

Of course, the infernal fly in the ointment is the fallenness of mankind. Although it is cosmically appropriate for human creatures to content themselves with playing the moon to the Creator's sun and to be satisfied with the privilege of reflecting YHWH's glory (even though in so doing they are confessing that they have no glory of their own), people are not willing to do so. Indeed, it is the stuff of fallenness to be offended by God's claim that He alone is worthy of honor, and instead to exalt oneself, to thrust oneself onto the throne of one's private universe. The Luciferian rebellion is reiterated moment by

moment in the souls of the unredeemed offspring of Adam when they, in effect, intone the most cardinal credo of fallenness:

*I will raise my throne above the stars of God,*

*And I will sit on the mount of assembly*

*In the recesses of the north.*

*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;*

*I will make myself like the Most High. (Is. 14:13–14)<sup>11</sup>*

It might be argued, in fact, that this proclivity to exalt self is the essence of sinfulness. As Strong observed,

Sin, therefore, is not merely a negative thing, or an absence of love to God. It is a fundamental and positive choice or preference of self instead of God, as the object of affection and the supreme end of being. Instead of making God the centre of his life, surrendering himself unconditionally to God and possessing himself only in subordination to God's will, the sinner makes himself the centre of his life, sets himself directly against God, and constitutes his own interest the supreme motive and his own will the supreme rule.<sup>12</sup>

This is the flesh that even in the believer sets its desire against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17); the lofty thing that raises itself up against Christ (2 Cor. 10:5); and the old self that has been corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit (Eph. 4:22).

It is in such a moral universe that biblical counselors must minister, indeed must consciously conceive of themselves as ministering. On the one hand, the omnipotent Creator and Sovereign of the universe demands that finite humans honor Him as such, and it is altogether appropriate that He receive that honor. On the other hand, every fallen person, whether unredeemed or redeemed, is possessed of an Adamic nature that longs to be like God, that compels each one of us to usurp the place of honor and dominion that rightly belongs only to God, despite the fact that it is altogether inappropriate that any person receive such honor.

### **God Alone Is God**

By reason of these two factors, biblical counselors must constantly and consciously arm their spirit, inform their instruction, and constrain their counselees with a commitment to glorify God and God alone. Such a commitment will compel us to exult in the truth that God alone is God, and to acknowledge joyfully that every creature of God is under sacred obligation both to resist the temptation to exalt self and to honor God as God!

All of this might be more simply expressed in this short rendering: God is God, and I am not! God alone is eternal; He knows the end from the beginning, and thus He is able to comprehend exactly how all things will in fact "work together for good," no matter how distressing some of those things might seem to us (given that we can know only today, and that but haltingly and partially). God alone is sovereign; we can depend on Him to order the affairs of the moral universe so as to silence the great accuser of the brethren and to cause His children to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God alone is true altogether; His word is life and light, and thus are we eternally well-advised to cast

ourselves entirely upon His promises and to find in His word (and in His word alone) all things that pertain to life and godliness; even though we will be set upon from every quarter by theories and truth-claims that contravene the Word of God and are so seductive as to be alluring almost beyond resistance.

But God is God, and I am not! Therefore, God deserves to be honored, worshiped, trusted, feared, and loved as God. Our responsibility and privilege is to glorify Him: to enhance His reputation in the minds of rational creatures and to live our lives and order our days so that all who encounter us will have a higher regard for God than they might have had they never encountered us! But our besetting temptation is to glorify self: to live life as if we were the center of the universe, as if the enhancement of our reputation were a meritorious pursuit, and as if our contentment were the greatest good of the cosmos. That is why every believer must continually be confronted with the demand that God be honored as God. And that is why biblical counseling must be framed by a conscious, undeviating commitment to the glory of God!

### **SELFISH PREDISPOSITIONS RESULT IN DESTRUCTION**

A conscious commitment to a godward focus in biblical counseling is also imperative because destructive consequences are certain to follow when people exalt themselves rather than God. This truth is particularly significant in biblical counseling, because so many who seek our help have, in fact, plunged themselves into just such destruction. They have fulfilled the longing to aggrandize self, and the price to be paid for such spiritual rebellion is the most profound tragedy of the human soul. In short, the temptation to exalt self is at once terribly seductive and certainly destructive.

### **Jonah: Tempted, Fallen, Restored**

The prophet Jonah struggled with the temptation to exalt himself over God, to pursue his own desires rather than obey God's commands, and he lost that struggle. The prophet high-handedly rejected God's Word and became so morally inept that he convinced himself he could run from the presence of God. He discovered in rather dramatic fashion, however, that YHWH was no stranger to Joppa or to the seaplanes that led to Tarshish. The result of the prophet's rebellion was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish!

Jonah did come to repentance, of course, and his prayer of contrition and confession is recorded in Jonah 2. In that prayer Jonah called out in distress after he had been cast into "the deep, into the heart of the seas" (v. 3). He bemoaned the fact that because of his own wickedness he found himself in the "great deep" with seaweed wrapped about his head (v. 5). Even as he was "fainting away," as the breath of life was about to slip from him, he "remembered the LORD," fastened his soul's eye upon the temple in which YHWH had placed His name (v. 7), and acknowledged his foolishness and sin. Then God responded by rescuing the prophet from the great fish.

In Jonah's psalm of repentance (vv. 2–9) we find a brief statement that speaks directly to the issue at hand: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies" (v. 8, KJV). In other words, sin is both seductive and destructive.

### **Sin: Deceptive and Delicious**

In speaking of the seductive nature of sin, Jonah acknowledged that he had "observed lying vanities." The Hebrew verb translated "observe" means "to give themselves up to" or "devote themselves

to.”<sup>13</sup> It suggests dogged determination or clinging to something in spite of influences to do otherwise.<sup>14</sup> The lying vanity Jonah clung to was “false love for his country, that he would not have his people go into captivity, when God would; would not have Nineveh preserved, the enemy of his country.”<sup>15</sup> But the phrase “lying vanities” is more generic, it encompasses “all things which man makes into idols or objects of trust.”<sup>16</sup>

Human devices contrary to the will of God are “lying vanities;” empty, they bring no satisfaction; lying, they promise peace and safety, but bring misery and horrible troubles. So Eve found, so Pharaoh, so Israel when they went after the ways of the heathen. So Jonah himself. So all who forsake the Fountain of living waters and hew out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Worldly devices to get happiness apart from God are indeed “vanity of vanities.”<sup>17</sup>

With regard to the destructive nature of sin, Jonah acknowledged in his prayer that by clinging to empty, self-serving lies he had forsaken his “own mercy”; he had forfeited the goodness and grace that God longed to bestow upon him.

In God is salvation; out of him is destruction. There is something appalling in the doom which is here described as overtaking those who, when the Saviour may be found, turn their back upon him, in order to seek and to serve other gods. Such are said to “forsake their own mercy.” They act against their highest interests; they refuse the richest blessing; they abjure their truest Friend.<sup>18</sup>

Keil developed this same thought with reference to Jonah’s warning concerning “forsaking one’s own mercy”:

The soul of man cannot be satisfied with husks. For God’s servants to follow them is to forsake their own mercy. It is for the prodigal son to change the father’s house for the society of rioters and harlots: “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about” (Ps. 32:10). The way of duty is ever the way of safety, peace, and comfort; neglected duty is a sure fore-runner of trouble; an evil conscience can never be the harbinger of sweet content.<sup>19</sup>

The significance, then, of Jonah’s confession is simply this: those who stubbornly cling to seductive lies deprive themselves of the mercy and goodness God longs to shower upon them. From the belly of Sheol (Jon. 2:2), Jonah acknowledged the God-dishonoring wickedness and soul-destroying foolishness of his stubbornness and repented.

### **“Lying Vanities”: Empty, Self-Serving Lies**

Jonah obeyed a lie. That lie was two-fold: (1) he believed that his desire for the destruction of Nineveh was more worthy than YHWH’s desire for the repentance of that city; and (2) he believed that he could actually flee from the “presence of YHWH” (1:3). It is difficult to accept that Jonah actually believed that lie; he was, after all, a true prophet of YHWH (2 Kin. 14:25). It defies credulity to suggest that a ministering prophet was persuaded that his desire transcended the command of God in worthiness or importance, or that such a spokesman for God consciously conceived of YHWH as a local deity so bound by space that a person could escape His presence by taking ship. But the issue whether Jonah actually believed the lie and whether he would have consciously affirmed the credibility of its claims is moot; the historical fact, recorded in the Bible, is that he obeyed the lie. Jonah confessed that because of his own desires (“lying vanities”: empty and self-serving lies) he rendered himself so spiritually foolish that he

behaved as if the lie were true (“they that observe”: cling to, embrace, cherish in spite of all influences to the contrary) and thus brought suffering upon himself.

The horrifying spiritual reality of Jonah’s experience is this: the power of a lie is not intrinsic in its inherent credibility but in its attractiveness. The pivotal moral issue is not whether people will believe the lie but whether they will obey it! The father of lies learned in the Garden that a lie of almost infinite implausibility (“in the day ye eat ... ye shall be as gods,” Gen. 3:5) will seduce if it is sufficiently tantalizing (“good for food ... pleasant to the eyes ... to be desired to make one wise,” v. 6). In short, a lie is powerful not because it is deceptive but because it is delicious.<sup>20</sup>

To make the same point from a different perspective, a lie is effective only because of our selfish predisposition, because as fallen creatures we are so bent upon pandering to our own desires that we will render ourselves so spiritually foolish as to obey a lie we would never consciously affirm. But that selfish predisposition is in every case destructive. When people determine to abandon what they know to be the truth in order to embrace a beguiling lie, they forsake God’s mercy. That is the testimony of the prophet Jonah.

Anyone who counsels will, by the nature of that ministry, confront people who have obeyed seductive lies, and who have forsaken their own mercy. They have obeyed lies because of their selfish predisposition. In other words, they have rejected a godward focus in favor of a self-ward focus, and the result has been spiritual, emotional, physical, and/or relational destruction. They are living in the middle of Jonah 2:8, but their only hope is found in Jonah 2:9. They have set their eyes upon themselves and have brought havoc into their lives. We must confront them with this wickedness and challenge them to set their eyes upon God, to obey His word, to live their lives for His glory, and in this to confess and experience that “Salvation is of the Lord”!

### **Lying Vanities in Christian Counseling**

The tragedy in the contemporary marketplace is that many models of Christian counseling are based on theories more accurately subsumed under the error of Jonah 2:8 (“lying vanities”) than under the truth of Jonah 2:9 (“Salvation is of the Lord!”). Wittingly or not, some counselors have proven themselves to be blind leaders of the blind; they have acquiesced to ear-tickling notions that are sub-biblical and God-dishonoring, notions that only make people more comfortable in their wickedness.

It is distressing to contemplate the catalogue of “lying vanities” that have insinuated themselves into sundry models of “Christian” counseling: models that legitimize a narcissistic preoccupation with self; models that fabricate a dimension to the human psyche that cannot be proven to exist, but the acknowledgment of which has the insidious practical effect of making individuals the victims of forces for which they cannot be held accountable, and thus of denying that people are morally responsible for the way they act, think, or feel; models that validate the notion that finite creatures have a right to be angry with the infinite Judge of the universe (who has, in fact, assured us that He will do right, Gen. 18:25), and that there can be spiritual and therapeutic benefit to expressing such an attitude of rage against God; models that speak of emotional healing and growth in relationships and in maturity while deliberately eschewing any appeal to the Holy Spirit or to the standard graces vouchsafed us by God.

All of these are lies! They are not intellectually compelling to anyone operating within a scriptural worldview, but because they make people comfortable in their sin they are extremely seductive. Furthermore, because it is a fixed reality of the moral universe that all who observe lying vanities will always forsake their own mercy, these lies are also destructive.

For both the counselor and the counselee, the means to counter these destructive lies is to make a deliberate and practical commitment to focus on the glory of God. This was the delivering discovery of the prophet Jonah. When he focused on his selfish desires he found himself in a mess, but when he recognized the destructiveness of his selfish predisposition, when he confessed the enslaving character of the lying vanities he had embraced, when he acknowledged that in clinging to those vanities he had forsaken God's goodness and brought destruction upon himself, Jonah found release. Millions have followed his example, people who would happily confess that all the glory and praise for the relief they found belongs to God alone.

### **THE DYNAMICS OF JESUS' SPIRITUAL PARADOX**

Well into His eighteen-month ministry in Galilee, when opposition had increased dramatically and it was apparent that time was short, Jesus called to Himself the twelve men He had authorized as apostles. He empowered them to work miracles as proof of that authorization and then dispatched them to "preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Matt. 10:7). Anticipating the difficulties His apostles would encounter, however, the Lord armed them with a promise as enigmatic as it was blessed. It was a paradoxical promise, at once the most rudimentary governing principle of the moral universe as framed by God and the greatest stumbling stone to mortals, who insist on defining that moral universe based on finite perspectives and distorted human values. What was that paradoxical promise? "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

On three other occasions recorded in the Gospels, Jesus proclaimed this principle. Some weeks after the Lord had authorized the apostles, He traveled with them to a remote area known as Caesarea-Philippi. There He told them for the first time that He would suffer many things of the Jewish leaders and would die (16:21). The disciples were horrified. Then Jesus followed this unhappy revelation with the warning that they, too, would have to be willing to take up a cross, deny themselves, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). As part of that challenge, Jesus said,

*For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it;*

*and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. (Mark 8:3)*

*And again, in the midst of His final trip to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, Jesus confronted His antagonists, the Pharisees, with this cryptic warning:*

*Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it,*

*and whoever loses his life shall preserve it. (Luke 17:33)*

Finally, during the final Passion Week, Jesus addressed "certain Greeks" who had sought Him out. Contemplating His own impending death, Jesus said,

*He who loves his life loses it;*

*and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. (John 12:25)*

On at least four different occasions, while addressing three different audiences, our Lord uttered this hard saying. To finite humans, these are difficult words: paradoxical at best, nonsensical at worst. But they are, in fact, the words of the Savior Himself and they are words that communicate a truth central to His teaching about living successfully.

### **Losing Life—Finding Life**

To understand Christ's promise we need to consider two nuances of the word life that are at stake.<sup>21</sup> The warning is that whoever wishes to save his or her life (that is, temporal, material life) will lose it (that is, eternal blessedness). The promise is that whoever is willing to lose life (again, temporal matters) for the sake of the Savior will, in fact, find life (again, eternally significant matters). Indeed, Hort insisted that "this 'paradoxical' saying gets its point from the fact that men call by the name of 'life' that which is not truly life: 'he that wishes to save his 'life' (i.e. life in the narrower sense) will lose his true 'life' (i.e. life in its highest sense)."<sup>22</sup> Morison acknowledged this same distinction; he paraphrased the warning: "In grasping at the shadow he shall infallibly lose the substance."<sup>23</sup>

The statement is paradoxical, then, only because people do not comprehend what constitutes real life. They are fully persuaded that life consists in the things that a person has; Jesus said it does not (Luke 12:15). They live under the delusion that satisfaction lies in accomplishing goals, establishing a reputation, exercising great power, and amassing much wealth; Jesus stated simply that the person who learns to hunger and thirst after righteousness is blessed, because that person will be filled (that is, satisfied, Matt. 5:6). The soulish individuals, who have persuaded themselves that happiness and contentment are to be found in the present world, are compelled by the force of their own abominable logic to set their eyes on this world.

But the dynamic of Jesus' spiritual paradox constrains us to focus on the glory of God rather than upon the gratification of our own desires. The rationale for such a selfless ethic is as uncomplicated to the eye of faith as it is inscrutable to the natural man; it is as compelling to one impelled by the Spirit as it is repugnant to one controlled by the flesh. That rationale is simply this: "Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's sake shall save it!" In other words, the only way to find a fruitful and contented life is to give one's self away to God ("My sake") and to others ("the gospel's sake").

It might be argued that there is egocentrism latent in this ethic, that giving one's life away with the motive of getting it back is only selfishness once removed. But this argument is based on the mistaken notion that God is displeased if people are happy, that God wants them to be miserable, and, thus, that it is morally inappropriate for anyone to long for or strive for happiness. In fact, God is a good and loving God who yearns for His creatures to find the soul-satisfaction He has provided for them. The univocal testimony of Scripture is that God's heart longs for each person to find contentment. Indeed, God so loved the world that He gave His own Son in order to provide such soul-satisfying peace. Wickedness lies not in the desire to find contentment of soul but in the determination to find it at the expense of God's standards and mandates. God takes immeasurable delight in those who determine to obey Him and by means of that obedience to know the peace that transcends human comprehension.

### **Focusing on God**

So we see again the necessity of a focus upon the glory of God in the ministry of counseling. Tragedy will certainly befall people who live each day in an attempt to find satisfaction, for in that very effort they

will lose it! When these soul-sick individuals come to us for counseling, we need to encourage them to honor the dynamic of Jesus' spiritual paradox; that is, to redirect their focus, to set their soul's gaze first of all upon God and then upon those about them, and then to order their lives in ways consistent with that focus. Lamentably, the effect of much counseling today is to reinforce the counselee's focus upon self. Exegetical and theological acrobatics are attempted to justify this strategy, but such efforts notwithstanding, this counsel is twice grievous: it is explicitly condemned by the Scriptures, and it is disastrous to the counselee.

How much wiser and God-honoring it is to acknowledge the authority of Jesus' person and the truth of His words, and to prove the life-changing power of the spiritual paradox He gave to us.

The way of self-crucifixion and sanctification may seem foolishness and waste to the world, just as burying good seed-corn seems waste to the child and the fool. But there never lived the man who did not find that, by sowing to the Spirit, he reaped life everlasting.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, the spirit of the biblical counselor must be like that expressed by the psalmist David: "Be thou exalted, O God above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth" (Ps. 57:5, KJV). Indeed, the primary goal of counselor must be to see this same spirit functioning as the controlling attitude in counselee's lives. Only as a person's heart becomes overwhelmed with the desire articulated by the psalmist and is consumed with the prayer, "Be thou exalted, O God," is that person going to know the peace God longs to give to His children.

The realities of the moral universe demand that I live my life out in every way for His honor rather than for my own; after all, God is God, and I am not! But the deepest need of my soul also constrains me to honor God as God, to submit to His standards and cherish His instruction; only as I thus hunger and thirst after righteousness will I be filled. Indeed, as Tozer has reminded us:

There is a logic behind God's claim to preeminence. That place is His by every right in earth or heaven. While we take to ourselves the place that is His, the whole course of our lives is out of joint. Nothing will or can restore order till our hearts make the great decision: God shall be exalted above.<sup>25</sup>

John MacArthur, *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005).

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