

Rush Witt, M.DIV., D.MIN.

Foreword by Dwayne Milioni

A Strategy for Incorporating Biblical Counseling in North American Church Plants

REFORMED ACADEMIC DISSERTATIONS

“As a church planter, I am thrilled to see Rush put into words so much of what was rumbling around in my heart almost twenty-five years ago when I set out to see biblical counseling incorporated into the very DNA of our church, instead of being some ancillary ministry off to the side. By God’s grace, that original focus has borne the fruit of hundreds of changed lives and has allowed us to see Ephesians 3:20 on display: ‘Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think . . .’ I wish I’d had this book as I stepped into the choppy waters of church planting more than two decades ago. If you’re just getting started in ministry or you’re frustrated by the lack of changed lives, read this book, live it out, and pass it on to others who can do the same!”

—**Brad Bigney**, Lead Pastor, Grace Fellowship Free Church, Florence, Kentucky; ACBC certified counselor

“Whether you are in the think tanks or the trenches of building churches, one tension point must be addressed: how to envision and structure a church so that the gospel’s mission in the world and the care of the saints both find healthy expression. This tension is expressed in a number of ways. Can evangelism and sanctification both thrive in one church? Can pastors be focused on reaching the lost and counseling the saved at the same time? Can a body of believers care for their own and minister into the world with equal proficiency and faith? Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the present-day context of church planting. How do we plant churches with a blended DNA of proactive biblical mission and personal biblical ministry?”

“Rush Witt’s work deals with this important question carefully and astutely because he lives in both worlds. He is a planter and a biblical counselor. He knows the tension inside and out. He’s wrestled with it, and his heart’s desire is to see it brought into proper balance and effective application. His study introduces us to the theological essentials of church planting and biblical counseling, demonstrating how these emphases are actually much more congruent and work-

able than we may think. This developing field of ecclesiology and missiology deserves serious attention. Witt's contribution can help anyone who desires to see churches planted with mission and care think more clearly and concretely about the task at hand."

—**Andy Farmer**, pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania; board member, Biblical Counseling Coalition; author, *Trapped* and *Real Peace*

"Contrary to some church-planting voices, Rush Witt insists on two simple principles: church planters must not only attract and evangelize but also shepherd and disciple, and biblical counseling is one effective, Christ-mandated way to do so. Few pastors are more skilled—with boots on the ground—than Rush to show us how biblical counseling and church planting seamlessly combine to build healthy, enduring churches. I hope other planters will follow his lead."

—**Robert D. Jones**, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Pursuing Peace* and *Uprooting Anger*

"As Rush Witt's dissertation rightly observes, writings that bring together biblical counseling and church planting are rare. Witt's work is both theologically compelling and practically accessible, and I believe it can help fill the gap. This book demonstrates the essential nature of biblical counseling in carrying out the Great Commission while offering a strategic plan to implement it, and it would serve as an incredible blessing to any church planter. Maybe the greatest personal compliment I can offer is to say that I wish I'd had this book fifteen years ago when we started Lighthouse."

—**Kim Kira**, Primary Teaching Elder, Lighthouse Community Church, Torrance, California

"Church-planting models have historically focused heavily on identifying church planters with the gifting of entrepreneurship and

evangelism. Rush Witt presents an alternative model that emphasizes the call and gifting of the church planter as shepherd and counselor. Since church planting is one of the most effective evangelistic strategies, then equipping the church planter in soul care through biblical counseling is essential to his role if he will faithfully disciple those who profess Christ as Savior.”

—**Zach Nelson**, Executive Director, Pillar Church Planting Network

“The resurgence of church-planting fervor within many segments of the North American church is clear. What’s left to be seen is whether this rise will measurably correlate with changes to the evangelization of North America or the maturation of disciples in these newly formed churches. In *A Strategy for Incorporating Biblical Counseling in North American Church Plants*, Rush Witt provides a needed prescription for one often-overlooked tool for bringing the Word of God to bear on unreached communities in a winsome and loving, yet truth-filled fashion through biblical counseling. Rush’s expertise as a church planter and biblical counselor makes him a valuable guide for those of us, like me, not only seeking to do more than start a few churches, but also striving to give our lives to see robust, Spirit-filled disciples living out God’s truth in every area of life.”

—**Matt Rogers**, Assistant Professor of Church Planting, Southeastern Seminary; Pastor, The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, South Carolina

“If you are preparing to plant a church, you need a plan for biblical counseling. Rush Witt helps build an understanding of how biblical counseling is essential to the ministry of the Word in the local church. This book is a great resource to consider for cultivating a ‘culture of change’ in your church, along with practical help in equipping lay leaders for the work. Church planters would do well to read this book before they plant!”

—**Dave Russell**, Lead Pastor, Oakhurst Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

“Rarely do we find church planting and biblical counseling put together, but both are vitally important to gospel mission and gospel fidelity. Rush Witt combines his skills from both of these worlds to make an impactful book that will serve many. A church plant grows within a few years and becomes a church. Having Word-based counseling in the foundational structures may be hard at the outset, but it is a necessary and worthy task for the longevity and biblical faithfulness of the church. My prayer is that this book will awaken church planters to understand the necessity of biblical counseling and awaken faithful counselors to lend their expertise to church plants.”

—**Mike Seaver**, Lead Pastor, Risen Hope Church, Summerville, South Carolina; Founder, 1Charleston

“In a culture and society that believes that the only authoritative source of counseling can come from the local counseling clinic, this book is a liberating change that points Christians to the local Christian church. The very powerful combination of the public (preaching) and private (counseling) ministry of the Word in the church is the potent agent for real life change. Rush Witt has captured the priority of training up well-qualified counselors within the context of the church who are capable ministers of divine truth. His book will be an invaluable guide in establishing the rich ministry of counseling and training in the church.”

—**John D. Street**, Professor, The Master’s University & Seminary; President, ACBC Board of Trustees

A Strategy for Incorporating Biblical Counseling in North American Church Plants

Reformed Academic Dissertations

A Series

Series Editor
John J. Hughes

A Strategy for Incorporating Biblical Counseling in North American Church Plants

Rush Witt


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To Kathryn, Hannah, Sophie, and Josiah.
I am grateful for your love.
And I am overjoyed to rest in the gospel with you.

Contents

Series Introduction	ix
Foreword by Dwayne Milioni	xi
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xv
1. Foundational Issues	1
<i>Purpose</i>	
<i>Goals</i>	
<i>Background Information</i>	
<i>Research Methodology</i>	
<i>Research Instruments</i>	
<i>Chapter Summaries</i>	
2. Biblical and Theological Foundations	24
<i>The Priority of Church Planting in the New Testament</i>	
<i>The New Testament Emphasis on Progressive Sanctification</i>	
<i>Doctrines Relative to Biblical Counseling and Church Planting</i>	
<i>The Doctrine of the Great Commission</i>	
<i>The Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture</i>	
<i>The Doctrine of Biblical Anthropology</i>	
<i>The Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
3. Theoretical, Historical, and Contemporary Models	57
<i>An Absence of Historical and Contemporary Models</i>	
<i>Established Churches Exercising a Formalized Model for Church Planting</i>	
<i>Principal Resources</i>	

CONTENTS

<i>Supporting Resources</i>	
<i>Interviews</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
4. Details and Procedures of the Ministry Project	85
<i>Research Design</i>	
<i>Participant Selection</i>	
<i>Survey Instrument</i>	
<i>Resultant Strategy Content and Methodologies</i>	
<i>Strategy Overview</i>	
<i>Step 1: Cultivating a Culture of Change in the Church Plant</i>	
<i>Step 2: Equipping Biblical Counseling Leaders in the Church Plant</i>	
<i>Step 3: Establishing Organizational Structures for Counseling in the Church Plant</i>	
<i>Statistical Analysis of the Data</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	
5. The Analysis of the Ministry Project	110
<i>Analysis of the Data</i>	
<i>Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project</i>	
<i>Lessons Learned and Opportunities for Further Study</i>	
Appendix A: Survey of Biblical Counseling among Church Plants	129
Appendix B: Survey Scores by Responder	136
Appendix C: Statistical Data	140
Bibliography	146
Index of Scripture	165
Index of Subjects and Names	167

Series Introduction

P&R Publishing has a long and distinguished history of publishing carefully selected, high-value theological books in the Reformed tradition. Many theological books begin as dissertations, but many dissertations are worthy of publication in their own right. Realizing this, P&R has launched the Reformed Academic Dissertation (RAD) program to publish top-tier dissertations (Ph.D., Th.D., D.Min., and Th.M.) that advance biblical and theological scholarship by making distinctive contributions in the areas of theology, ethics, biblical studies, apologetics, and counseling.

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We look forward to seeing the RAD program grow into a large collection of curated dissertations that will help to advance Reformed scholarship and learning.

John J. Hughes
Series Editor

Foreword

The foundation of the local church is the inspired Word of God. Church planting exists to establish pillars of God's truth in communities that need gospel transformation (1 Tim. 3:15). How should a church plant implement a ministry of God's Word within its DNA to create a culture of change within the church that emanates out to the community that it is hoping to reach? As Tim Keller points out in his recent book on preaching, the ministry of God's Word in the church should be holistic, involving differing layers of emphasis from more formal to less. All the essential ministries of the church should stress biblical truth: preaching, discipleship, small groups, evangelism, leadership development, and counseling. While biblical counseling has found its way into many established, gospel-centric churches since the advent of the "BC" movement, there has been very little emphasis on including biblical counseling as an essential component of a church-planting strategy. Some church planters are even advised against establishing a counseling ministry in the early years of their church plant.

As a church planter and professor of applied theology (preaching and counseling), I have been privileged to see Rush Witt navigate uncharted waters with a church-planting strategy that involves a holistic approach to the ministry of the Word, including biblical counseling—and to do so successfully. From the beginning of this new work, he has been committed to the idea that his church plant would be characterized by a culture of change. I watched Rush implement biblical counseling into his new church, something that I had not seen in the dozen church plants with which I had previously

FOREWORD

been involved. He even used biblical counseling as an evangelistic opportunity by providing free counseling to the community—and it worked. I recently preached at the fifth anniversary of this church and heard many stories of how the ministry of biblical counseling had been the turning point in people’s journey of faith and the key to their joining Rush’s church. I became a believer.

This book is an extension of Rush Witt’s doctor of ministry thesis project on implementing a biblical counseling strategy within a church-planting model. Having proved that this strategy can work, Rush now offers this book as a valuable resource to encourage other planters and planting churches to include biblical counseling as an essential element. The book will explain the priority of church planting in the New Testament and emphasize the doctrine of sanctification as a key characteristic for every church. Then readers will learn how to implement gospel transformation (Rush calls it a “culture of change”) into the DNA of their churches. As a result, the preaching of church planters will be transformed as they think about the need to do counseling as they proclaim God’s Word. Planters will add biblical counseling to their small-group model to fulfill the “one another” commands of the Scriptures. They will also include biblical counseling in their leadership training. In the end, a holistic approach to the ministry of God’s Word can be accomplished and become very useful to foster transformation within church plants and an effective outreach ministry for their communities. I am grateful for this book and excited for the journey on which its readers are about to embark.

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Chairman of the Board
The Pillar Church Planting Network

Preface

This Doctor of Ministry Project Report explains the author's attempt to study the fields of biblical counseling and church planting with the intent of developing an initial strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in the church planting context. Current statistical data regarding the dichotomy between the biblical counseling and church planting movements indicated the need for such a project. The findings from the study indicated an opportunity to benefit the ministries of church planting and biblical counseling by connecting them.

After completing extensive biblical, theological, practical research, the writer developed a three-step strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in North American church plants. The strategy was developed as an ongoing process to utilize biblical counseling within the evangelism and discipleship efforts within Paramount Church, a church plant in Columbus, Ohio. The strategy was organized around three objectives: to cultivate a culture of change; to equip counselors; and to establish organizational structures for biblical counseling among church plants.

The ministry project itself utilized a fifty-question Likert survey. The survey was taken by 101 church planters from various states and denominations. The results indicated a special need among church planters for additional instruction, evaluation, and assistance relative to developing a philosophy of biblical counseling within the DNA of church plants and to practically execute a plan for biblical counseling in the church planting context. Overall, the research, strategizing, and conclusions of this project indicate a continued need for additional work to assist church plants and church planters to maximize in ministry the principles and tools of biblical counseling.

Acknowledgments

From the beginning it was clear to me this project would require a team effort. I am grateful to all those who have assisted me in the course of the Doctor of Ministry program, as well as in the course of this project. Above all, I am grateful to our Redeemer God whose saving grace placed me in Christ and whose enabling grace keeps me there. The exaltation of the gospel, through the all-sufficient counsel of his Word, has been my primary motivation throughout.

I am grateful to my family for their sacrificial love. Their encouragement, prayers, and patience have been instrumental to my life and sanctification through the process of this project. Along with my family, I am grateful to my brothers and sisters in Christ, many of whom have invested much to this project.

I am grateful to those who have provided feedback and critiques. I am grateful to my longtime friend, Tanner Turley who provided feedback from the perspective of a church planter striving to magnify the counsel of God's Word. I am grateful to my older brother in Christ Mark Armstrong who provided feedback from the perspective of a pastoral team, utilizing biblical counseling to win the lost, to sanctify believers, and to shepherd the flock of God among them. I am grateful to my classmate and friend Zach Nelson who provided feedback relative to the development of biblical counseling within a growing church planting network. I am grateful to Dr. Frank Catanzaro who agreed to serve as my Faculty Chair. Furthermore, I am grateful to him for graciously walking my family out of the deep woods of spiritual depression, fear, and worry. Many thanks as well to Dr. Robert Jones, who has been a mentor to me in

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a variety of ways. I am grateful to Dr. Dwayne Milioni who served as my Field Mentor. Over the past ten years, he has been to me a true shepherd in the faith, father in the ministry, and brother in the gospel. I am grateful, as well, to Greg Savage who loaned his statistical wizardry in the analysis of the project data. I am also grateful to Drs. John Ewart and Charles Harvey.

The combined efforts of those listed above, and many others, have launched this project into an important while often overlooked subtopic within church planting. Any shortcomings that remain are solely a reflection on its author.

It is my sincere prayer these combined efforts will propel the modern church planting movement forward, in concert with the wise and winsome counsel of Scripture. I hope the ongoing development of this project will make a helpful contribution to healthy local churches, as they make the gospel paramount for the pleasure of God and the good of their neighbors.

Coram Deo

1

Foundational Issues

Of the many concerns for ministry, two have risen to the top of the researcher's priorities. One concern is for the growth of church planting within the evangelical community. The second concern is for the place of biblical counseling in the church planting context. In an effort to marry these concerns together, the focus of this paper is to promote the implementation of biblical counseling ministry within the church planting context. The overarching objective has been to develop a strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in North American church plants from the inception of the church plant.

Purpose

Since 1970, two major Christian movements have emerged: the modern church planting movement and the biblical counseling movement.¹ Despite the wonderful development of both, there is yet a ministry gap between them—that is, biblical counseling ministry has not consistently found a strong place within modern

1. Timothy Keller, "Four Models of Counseling in Pastoral Ministry," [www.redeemercitytocity.com](http://redeemercitytocity.com), http://redeemercitytocity.com/content/com.redeemer.digitalContentArchive.LibraryItem/489/Four_Models_of_Counseling_in_Pastoral_Ministry.pdf (accessed October 5, 2011).

church planting efforts.² The gospel-centrality of modern biblical counseling affords churches a significant advantage toward closing the gap and embracing biblical counseling as a key evangelical ministry.³ On the other hand, churches who fail to embrace gospel-centered biblical counseling are at a disadvantage to fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.⁴ This presents new and established churches with a critical dilemma. William Goode, biblical counseling pioneer and former pastor of Faith Baptist Church (Lafayette, IN) wrote, “Biblical counseling is not an option. Counseling must never be thought of as a weekly hour of magic, or an independent ministry conducted aside from the church. Preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and counseling are all integral parts that make up effective, biblical ministry.”⁵

Biblical counseling, then, is a goal worthy of pursuing with zeal and a wise aspiration in the local church.⁶ The hope is that the church planting movement may benefit from an endearing relationship with the ministry of biblical counseling. Likewise, a deepening relationship with church planting may also strengthen the biblical counseling movement over years to come.⁷ A valuable opportunity exists to bring the church planting and biblical counseling movements together for the good of the gospel. The purpose of this project was the development of a replicable strategy for incorporating biblical counseling philosophy and methodology into the DNA of

2. Greg Norfleet, “Planting a Church On the Fly,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Summer 2006): 40.

3. Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors For Your Church: The 4e Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 31–35.

4. *Ibid.*, 35.

5. John F. MacArthur Jr. and the Master’s College faculty, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 222–23.

6. David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 257.

7. David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Winston-Salem, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 116.

North American church plants, beginning in the earliest phase of planning and vision casting.

In church planting, many foci compete for the attention of church planters and pastors.⁸ In the early days of ministry, responsibilities include budgets to write, funds to raise, locations to determine, services to plan, unbelievers to reach, and communities to canvas.⁹ While each of these tasks play an integral role in ministry planning, the knowledge, awareness, and practice of formal and informal biblical counseling may be lacking or compromised.¹⁰ A grassroots movement of biblical counseling may continue to reach a new audience of church planters, strengthening new congregations and the church planting movement as a whole.¹¹

Naturally, the church planting milieu is a heavily evangelistic or conversion-oriented ministry. No authentic church plant does not reach or attempt to reach unbelievers.¹² The initial mission of a church plant, especially during the early years, is the evangelization of an unreached or underserved community.¹³ Phase 1 often includes a heavy emphasis upon gathering neighborhood research, designing ministry events, evangelistic networking and worship, and group-based outreach in preparation to launch the church.¹⁴ Additionally, if the church planted in an *unreached* or *under-served* location where little evangelical witness exists, new church starts naturally

8. J. D. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009), 155–57.

9. Timothy J. Keller and J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2002), 75–94.

10. David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 241.

11. *Ibid.*, 253.

12. Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 183.

13. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 4.

14. Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, Part II–III.

tend toward evangelism. A necessary balance must be maintained in established churches, as well as in the church planting context. It is a balance between a conversion-focus and a sanctification-focus.¹⁵ This balance within discipleship is necessary not only for the overall longevity of the church plant but also for the daily spiritual health of its members.¹⁶ As one church planting author noted, even Christians need to be evangelized because evangelism is exhortation and encouragement with the good news.¹⁷

Research and evaluation of the church planting movement reveals a counseling gap between these two movements. Various church planting authors, experts, and proponents display an unawareness of biblical counseling philosophy and an underestimation of the value of biblical counseling, especially in the earliest stages of a church plant. Taken together, these reveal a misunderstanding of what biblical counseling is and the important ways it operates within a healthy local church, especially a healthy church plant. Ed Stetzer, a frequent contributor to the topic of church planting, quotes pastor Andy Stanley on the subject of training young church planters, encouraging them to order time and responsibilities. Stanley states, “Sunday morning is for communicating, not counseling. In fact—and to some this may sound unspiritual—I don’t think you can actually build a church on people who need counseling. When your church has grown and you have resources, then those people can come back and be helped by the ministry you’ve built.”¹⁸ Although this quote could be in reference only to formal counseling, the fact Stetzer uses the term “counseling” without connecting it to

15. Ed Stetzer, “7 Top Issues Church Planters Face, Issue,” The Life-way Research Blog, entry posted February 2, 2011, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2011/02/7-top-issues-church-planters-f-3.html> (accessed May 2, 2011).

16. Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 214–16.

17. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 111–12.

18. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 100.

preaching, teaching, accountability, and other common activities in church planting ministry suggests a disconnect regarding the value and role place of “biblical counsel” in every area of church planting ministry.

In addition, this quote raises special concern due to the assumption of Stanley and Stetzer that a church cannot be built on “people who need counseling.”¹⁹ In Scripture, God has revealed every person needs counseling, and all of life involves the exchange of counsel. In fact, everything happening in the life of a healthy church explicitly involves counsel originating in the Scriptures.²⁰

The widely held view of counseling in churches, suggested above, does not reflect a pervasive culture of biblical wisdom in the local church. In the helpful book, *Discovering Church Planting*, J. D. Payne commits only one brief chapter to discipleship within church planting; and yet the chapter does not venture beneath the surface of discipleship, defining a disciple, discussing group formats, etc.²¹ Instead, Payne provides a very basic treatment of discipleship, which aims more at practicing simple obedience-oriented discipleship rather than an overwhelming emphasis on deeply sowing the gospel among the lives of sinning and suffering people. Preaching, small group interaction, one-on-one discipleship, evangelism, and the like are not categorized as sources or venues for biblical counsel. In reality, all of these ministries of the local church express biblical counseling. David Powlison wrote, “Whenever and wherever Christians counsel wisely in obedience to the Scriptures, biblical counseling happens, whether it is so titled or not.”²²

These ideas about counseling in the church planting milieu are not isolated, but common. Church planting author Darrin Patrick warns readers of the dangers of not referring difficult church members to “professional counselors” who appear better trained than pas-

19. Ibid.

20. MacArthur, *Counseling*, 3–6.

21. Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 103–13.

22. MacArthur, *Counseling*, 26.

tors for helping people with life problems.²³ One experienced and respected church planter urged a group of aspiring planters to avoid pastoral ministry for the first three years. He said, “For the first three years of a church plant, you’re (planters/pastors) not pastors. Don’t think of yourself as a pastor or shepherd. You’re an evangelist only. Don’t even think about pastoring or counseling people for three years. Your only job is to evangelize.”²⁴ These are two striking examples of a misunderstanding of the relationship between church planting and biblical counseling movements. This view of church plant ministry is quite different than the view of Mark Dever, a pastor and author who is committed to church planting and biblical counseling. Dever notes the value of personal ministry when he writes, “One of the most biblical and valuable uses of your time as a pastor will be to cultivate personal discipling relationships, in which you are regularly meeting with a few people one-on-one to do them good spiritually.”²⁵

Tim Lane, Executive Director of CCEF, agrees, “The ideal church is where the pastors who do the more formal public ministry of the Word focus on Christ in their preaching.²⁶ Then the ministry of the Word doesn’t stop there; it continues throughout the church. The discipling ministry, the children’s ministry, the youth ministry, the missions work, the worship ministry, the friendships and families—all of this operates on the same page by being Word oriented and Christ centered.”²⁷

23. Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), kindle-1732–38.

24. Monty Patton, “Panel Discussion” (lecture, First Baptist Church, Church Planting School, Woodstock, GA, September 13, 2011).

25. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 37.

26. From this point on, I will refer to the *Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation* as CCEF.

27. Tim Lane, “Cultivating a Culture of Counseling and Discipleship,” *9Marks eJournal* 5.6 (November/December 2008): 22–26, <http://www.9marks.org/files/ejournal200856novdec.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2013).

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

Regarding discipleship, Stetzer writes, “You can tell a lot about a movement by what it discusses—and how often. When asked how often they communicate regarding important values of the church, organic church leaders say they address the following key values to the church on a weekly or monthly basis:

- 97 percent—relationship with Christ.
- 97 percent—importance of prayer.
- 86 percent—maturing as a disciple.
- 85 percent—reading the Bible.
- 60 percent—personal evangelism.
- 35 percent—mission service.
- 26 percent—starting new churches.
- 18 percent—group evangelism.”²⁸

These statistics show many important issues are discussed by church planters. Yet, this list of common topics does not appear to include categorical language of gospel-centered counsel for troubles, trials, or lasting biblical change as purposed in modern biblical counseling. It is possible these statistics include biblical counsel under the heading “maturing as a disciple.” These topics do not clearly suggest in-depth counsel from the Scriptures is a common point of concern or practice.

Nevertheless, hope remains for strengthening the relationship of biblical counseling to church planting. John MacArthur notes, “I am encouraged to see a large movement of Christians returning to Scripture as the sole source of wisdom and correction for the human soul. I am grateful to God for the men and women he is using to awaken the church to this need.”²⁹ Misguided views on counseling, such as those represented above, have eased the process of dis-

28. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 126.

29. MacArthur, *Counseling*, xiv.

charging the counseling duties of ministry to secularists outside the church. Since the late nineteenth century, the modern psychologies have dominated the field of counseling, directing even the Church's understanding of human problems and their solutions.³⁰ Within evangelical Christianity, the principles of insight-oriented psychotherapy have not only overtly and covertly influenced the majority of congregants in some way but also they have been heartily adopted as truth. These churches and believers need help to shift from unbiblical (secularistic) thinking to biblical (theistic) thinking.³¹

The reality of this therapeutic culture within the church poses at least two concerns. One concern deals with the resistance to biblical counsel congregants may display. This requires a delicate pastoral hand in order to shepherd believers away from the false beliefs they have come to hold dearly and closer to the life-giving truths of Scripture. A second concern involves cultivating a broad sweeping culture of biblical change, which would reach beyond the instruction of individual believers and would be reflected in a congregation unified by the Bible's theme of redemption and its life-changing power. A shift back to biblical counseling appears underway, especially for Southern Baptists.³²

The main purpose of this project aimed at the development of a strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in North American church plants to help further this shift, especially among Southern Baptists. A strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in church planting may strengthen church plants in three foundational ways: by strengthening outreach ministries, by strengthening the process of progressive sanctification within the church, and by influencing

30. Ibid., 20–21.

31. David Powlison, "Which Presuppositions? Secular Psychology and the Categories of Biblical Thought," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12.4 (1984): 274.

32. Brad Hambrick, "Southern Baptists Move to Biblical Counseling," Crossroads Counseling, http://www.crossroadsaugusta.org/Articles_files/bch/SBCINTERVIEW.pdf (accessed January 5, 2009).

surrounding local churches. The importance of developing a strategy is compounded by the crucial nature of church planting within Great Commission efforts. Ongoing church planting efforts are thought to be the most crucial approach to numerical growth within Christ's body and the renewal of existing local churches.³³

A careful strategy provides robust opportunities for churches and even denominations to position biblical counseling squarely into their Great Commission efforts like church planting. By virtue of the focus on replication, new church starts hold a clear purpose to provide a fresh gospel witness where there is an insufficient or absent evangelical influence.³⁴ Because the gospel illustrates a primary revelation of God's work and wisdom, all true evangelicalism, regardless of the cultural milieu in which a church operates, is grounded in the clear presentation of godly counsel.³⁵ Since all evangelical influence is gospel-oriented and the gospel is a verbal message, biblical counsel is the foundational depiction of evangelical influence.³⁶ Biblical counseling seeks to counter the effects of sin in the world with the restorative truth of Scripture.³⁷ Therefore, biblical counseling should be an essential part of any church ministry, especially evangelistic ministry.³⁸

One of the grave misunderstandings about biblical counseling suggests it exists only for the purpose of discipleship or with helping Christians solve life problems.³⁹ While biblical counsel is primarily

33. Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 29.

34. Mike McKinley, *Church Planting Is For Wimps: How God Uses Messed-Up People to Plant Ordinary Churches That Do Extraordinary Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 30.

35. Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 46–51.

36. *Ibid.*, 11–15.

37. Paul David Tripp, *Broken-Down House* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2009), 18–21.

38. Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling and Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 174.

39. Rob Green, *Starting a Biblical Counseling Ministry in a Local Church* (Lafayette, IN: FBCM, 2009), 20.

profitable for teaching, reproving, correcting, and training Christians in righteousness, it is also useful for community outreach.⁴⁰ Faith Baptist Church (Lafayette, IN), a church whose ministry efforts have included strategizing biblical counseling as a church-wide ministry notes, “Some have the idea that counseling kills your evangelism. That is simply not true. In fact, effective biblical counseling enhances a church’s outreach and evangelistic ministry. Many counseling problems exist because a person doesn’t know Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.”⁴¹

David Powlison acknowledges evangelistic counsel helps unbelievers to understand the gospel more deeply by showing them what God has to say about their lives.⁴² Rob Green also notes three ways biblical counseling helps churches evangelize. First, the counsel of God’s Word provides Christians with an opportunity to meet their neighbors where they live and to help them.⁴³ Second, many people have come to Christ when their lives press them to search for answers. Biblical counseling provides the local church with a “captive audience of hurting people who need answers.”⁴⁴ Third, the in-depth nature of true biblical counsel helps people uncover heart issues, of which the need for regeneration is tantamount.⁴⁵

God changes the lives of people through good news says much more than, “man is sinful, Christ is Savior, repent and believe.”⁴⁶ The riches of the gospel speak to the very depths of human need and into every area of human life.⁴⁷ As such, the whole counsel of God in the gospel proves effective to help unbelievers understand the depth

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 61–64.

42. Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 129.

43. Green, *Starting a Biblical Counseling Ministry in a Local Church*, 62.

44. Ibid., 63.

45. Ibid.

46. Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 44–47.

47. Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, 2nd ed. (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 2–4.

of their need and Christ's purposes in every area of their lives.⁴⁸ Research shows nearly two in three pastors (62 percent) report more people from outside their church asking for help, and nearly a third (31 percent) see more such requests from church members, according to a survey of one thousand Protestant pastors.⁴⁹ A strategy for biblical counseling will deepen and extend a church plant's potential to manifest and illustrate the gospel, displaying for the community the marvelous riches of God's grace on the backdrop of their own specific lives.⁵⁰

A second way church planting may gain strength from a biblical counseling strategy is through an enlarged vision for progressive sanctification in the church. Healthy churches are characterized by a strong commitment to sanctification in the church.⁵¹ This key truth about church health originates in the Scriptures, where godly counsel is the catalyst for spiritual growth.⁵² Incorporating biblical counseling into the ministry DNA of a church plant may yield a number of tangible benefits. A prevalent biblical counseling mindset and strategy will help identify spiritual needs in the lives of Christians, will strengthen preaching, teaching, and mutual ministry between members, and will cultivate a culture of change from the first phase of church planting to the last.⁵³ Additionally, biblical counseling may help church plants involve every member in the process of becoming a healthy church.

A helpful shift within the church planting milieu would require a genuine emphasis upon the training of laity as well as pastors. As Paul David Tripp has noted, the pastoral staff of a church will never

48. Green, *Starting a Biblical Counseling Ministry in a Local Church*, 22.

49. Ed Stetzer. "Research / Demographics for Understanding and Engaging Culture," Ed Stetzer—The Lifeway Research Blog. <http://www.edstetzer.org/2009/05> (accessed October, 2010).

50. Eph. 2:7.

51. Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 198.

52. Ps. 1.

53. Green, *Starting a Biblical Counseling Ministry in a Local Church*, 22.

be able to shoulder the entire load of counseling within a church.⁵⁴ Jay Adams in his book *Competent to Counsel* presents a scriptural argument for biblical counseling being the work of every believer, not just the trained, titled, professional few.⁵⁵ Churches committed to biblical counseling should pursue proper and sufficient training of laity for the work of counseling in the church.⁵⁶ Today it appears many churches are reaping a whirlwind of consequences resulting from a disproportionate attention to numerical church growth and a neglect of face-to-face and in-depth growth in maturity.⁵⁷ As a result, though a Christian or even a pastor may rightly consider himself responsible to evangelize others, he may fail to grasp his biblical responsibility of admonishing, encouraging, helping, and maturing fellow believers.⁵⁸

A third way church planting may gain strength from a biblical counseling strategy is the new church's positive biblical influence upon surrounding churches.⁵⁹ During the late 1980s, a conservative evangelical resurgence brought about a higher view of the Scriptures and their sufficiency.⁶⁰ Even today, research shows a large percentage of Christians agree the Bible contains sacred or holy truth.⁶¹ Yet, as one author observes, those who profess the sufficiency of Scrip-

54. Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 63–78.

55. Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 41–43.

56. Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 115–16.

57. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 170–72.

58. John MacArthur Jr., *Body Dynamics* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982), 88–89. Here MacArthur discusses 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

59. *Ibid.*, 13–15.

60. James Carl Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, vol. 6 (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 2005), 45–48.

61. David Kinnaman, “New Research Explores How Different Generations View and Use the Bible,” The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible?q=inspired> (accessed October 20, 2011). The study reports: Mosaics 67%, Busters 81%, Boomers 89%, Elders 90%.

ture may struggle to treat the Bible as a grand piano, given by a Master Composer.⁶² The tendency among churches to practice scriptural insufficiency presents biblically informed church plants with a unique opportunity for positive influence among surrounding local churches. Since North American church plants minister in a culture offering many alternative theories of change for the lives of people, a crucial task in this strategy is articulately to define Christian counseling. Additionally, in light of secular counseling philosophies, the many differences within models of Christian counseling demands a clear distinction regarding what biblical Christian counseling upholds and how its philosophy works out in real-life. David Powlison wrote,

We must *know* that God’s way is qualitatively different from everything else available in the bazaar of options, of other counsels, other schemas, other practices, other systems. The only sanity and wakefulness is to know Him-who-is. Anything else perpetuates our insanity, our sleepwalk: See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Col. 2:8).⁶³

Jay Adams carefully defines the work of Christian counseling as one that “consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.”⁶⁴ While his three Cs of counseling—confrontation, concern, and change—are helpful in clarifying what is truly meant by the term

62. David Powlison, “Counsel the Word,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11.2 (Winter 1993): 2–3.

63. David Powlison, “Affirmations & Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Counseling* 19.1 (2002): 19.

64. Jay E. Adams, “What is Nouthetic Counseling,” *Institute for Nouthetic Studies*, <http://www.nouthetic.org> (accessed July, 2009).

“Christian Counseling,” the crucial issue is biblical counseling terms such as these must be more clearly defined and applied to ministry. Faith Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana, defines biblical counseling as “discerning thinking and behavior that God wants to change and verbally confronting those problems using the word of God for the benefit of the counselee and the glory of God. Biblical counseling is intensive discipleship; dealing specifically with non-organic problems.”⁶⁵ A coalition of biblical counselors recently united to develop a confessional statement for biblical counseling. In general, they define biblical counseling in this way:

Biblical counseling occurs whenever and wherever God’s people engage in conversations that are anchored in Scripture, centered on Christ and the Gospel, grounded in sound theology, dependent upon the Holy Spirit and prayer, directed toward sanctification, rooted in the life of the church, founded in love, attentive to heart issues, comprehensive in understanding, thorough in care, practical and relevant, and oriented toward outreach.⁶⁶

The need for clearly marked terms is further evidenced by the great lengths biblical counseling proponents have gone to define responsible biblical counseling thus far. Although these foundational definitions for biblical counseling are similar, they overlap and nuance at various points, calling local churches and individuals committed to biblical counseling to refine such concepts. Other definitions the proposed project will require are the concepts of progressive sanctification, sufficiency of Scripture, discipleship, secular psychology, lay person, heart, counseling ministry, church discipline, church planting, gospel, contextualization, and Great

65. Green, *Starting a Biblical Counseling Ministry in a Local Church*, 3.

66. “Confessional Statement,” The Biblical Counseling Coalition, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/about/confessional-statement/> (accessed August 7, 2011).

Commission. Defining key concepts of biblical counseling is valuable not only for the sake of clarity and semantics but also to help churches avoid the pitfalls of ideas and practices which deviate from biblical teachings on God, people, and gospel change.⁶⁷

Goals

In this project the author attempted to achieve four goals. The first goal was to research the field of church planting relative to the ministry of biblical counseling. Investigating the current condition and role of biblical counseling among a sampling of church plants is necessary in order to develop a strategy for biblical counseling in North American church plants.

The second goal was to analyze the research data for the purpose of determining the awareness of, commitment to, and preparedness for biblical counseling among a sampling of North American church plants. The project aimed the growth of biblical counseling ministry that extends beyond the formation of a counseling ministry within a church plant. Instead, the project aimed to incorporate biblical counseling ministry that permeates the DNA of the entire local church ministry. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate the current state of preaching, small groups, discipleship ministries, evangelism ministries, administrative structures, etc.

Subsequently, a third goal was to develop an articulate, effective, and practical strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in the ministry of North American church plants. The church planting milieu may be benefited greatly by a guide for equipping of planters, core members, and laity for gospel-centered ministry of the word, cultivating of a biblical counseling culture within church plants, and establishing of practical structures through which this vision for biblical counseling may become a reality.

A final and summary goal was to provide, through the project,

67. MacArthur, *Counseling*, 27.

a helpful contribution to the ministry fields of biblical counseling and church planting. Until recently, the field included only one other Doctor of Ministry project combining these two ministries. The project was undertaken by Pastor Greg Norfleet of Christ Community Church in Durham, North Carolina.⁶⁸ Due to delays in his degree progress, he shifted the focus of his project away from biblical counseling and church planting and is now focusing on biblical counseling training in an established local church. This project currently appears to be the only one of its kind and, this fact suggests efforts are even more crucial for this project to make a substantive contribution to the biblical counseling and church planting movements.

Background Information

Upon entering pastoral ministry in the late 90s the author stood firmly in an integrationist position concerning discipleship and counseling. At that time, he believed the “truth” of the modern psychologies provided a necessary complement to the Truth of Scripture. In 2002, the author began to realize some of the serious errors of this stance and by God’s grace forsook that position in exchange for the biblical alternative. Now practicing gospel-centered biblical counseling, the author realizes the need to promote and cultivate a biblical model of help, hope, and change. Now, as the lead pastor of a church plant committed to biblical counseling, the author is committed to cultivate this biblical model of counseling and discipleship into the church DNA. Two overarching reasons undergird this commitment.

The first and foremost reason for this project concerned the health and strength of local church congregations. As lead pastor of a church plant committed to biblical counseling, the author’s goal is

68. Pastor Norfleet is a Presbyterian pastor (PCA) who attended Westminster Theological Seminary.

for local churches to be well equipped to minister within the therapeutic culture in which we are planting. Within modern evangelical Christianity, the principles of insight-oriented psychotherapy have influenced congregants in such a way that some have heartily adopted them as well. The influence of psychology is a source of trouble for local churches because of the way some psychological principles for living inevitably undermine the authority of usefulness of God's Word.

In the author's ministry, context prior to church planting, he experienced significant tension caused by the conflict of biblical counseling philosophy held by the educational/pastoral staff and the integrationist philosophy held by the counseling ministry staff. Due to the influence of secular or integrationist counseling in the church, a crucial issue for biblically-minded Christian counselors is determining how to address and correct the influence of modern psychologies on the church as a whole and in the lives of individual Christians. This crucial issue should sound an alarm for pastors and laity, signaling a need for an increasingly articulate apologetic for biblical Christian counseling in the church. Meeting this need in the field of Christian counseling will require an insightful and articulate definition of biblical counseling theory/practice. Without such a definition, promoting, defending, and pursuing genuine ministry of the word within the local church will be hindered.

A second reason for the researcher's interest in this project topic was a concern for the local communities in which church plants and established local churches exist. Since gospel-centered pastors and Christians minister in a culture that offers many alternative theories of change for troubled lives, a crucial need exists for church planters to carefully practice biblical counseling. Beyond the conflicts inherent in secular counseling philosophies, the many nuances within models of Christian counseling demand a clear distinction regarding what biblical Christian counseling upholds and how its philosophy works out in real-life. A sufficient response requires more than merely defining Christian counseling as "Bible-based counseling."

Such a general definition opens a complicated door, welcoming differing and conflicting counseling models to operate under a generic banner, while neglecting the specific nuances making counseling genuinely biblical or pseudo-biblical.

Many Christians would agree the Bible is inspired, inerrant, infallible, and sufficient.⁶⁹ The actual role of Scripture in the counseling/change process does much to prove one's actual belief about scriptural sufficiency. For instance, one may state, "The Bible is sufficient to address the deepest and most important concerns of life." The way in which he uses the careful insights of Scripture to address the deepest and most important concerns of life reveals his actual belief about the sufficiency of Scripture. Clearly articulating what areas of life the Bible presides over is essential to helping God's flock and establishing an effective and comprehensible philosophy and methodology of biblical counseling.

The sufficiency of Scripture is a primary doctrine on which biblical counselors differ from some who integrate unbiblical philosophies and the Bible. John MacArthur draws attention to this stating, "Some biblical counselors err in believing the Bible is the whole bag of marbles. On the other hand, Christian psychologists with an integrationist epistemology do not believe the Bible has sufficient marbles for soul care."⁷⁰ MacArthur concludes this thought by noting, "The difference between biblical counseling and Christian psychology is a worldview issue. Biblical counselors believe the counselor needs new glasses. Christian psychologists believe the counselor needs more marbles."⁷¹ Developing a robust strategy for incorporating biblical counseling into the ministry DNA of church

69. David Kinnaman, "New Research Explores How Different Generations View and Use the Bible," The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible?q=inspired> (accessed November 16, 2011).

70. MacArthur, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, 33.

71. *Ibid.*, 40.

plants will help prepare future generations to give the modern therapeutic culture an answer for their hope of change.⁷²

The author and two fellow church planting elders hold these reasons in mind, planting Paramount Church with a central role for biblical counseling ministry. Columbus, Ohio, is a vibrant and growing crossroad of culture. Ethnic diversity, youthful population, vibrant university life, economic growth, artistic culture, and recent city revitalization poise Ohio's capital as a wonderful place to engage many people with the gospel. Hosting only a handful of theologically strong churches, Central Ohio suffers a significant need for a fresh gospel witness. Only 7 percent of Columbus residents identify with an evangelical denomination. The presence of only ninety-seven Southern Baptist churches leaves Columbus at less than half the national average. In fact, Southern Baptist churches account for only about 15,000 of the nearly 1.8 million residents of metro Columbus. Denominations such as Grace Brethren and Regular Baptists carry much of the load, yet there an enormous need remains. As a result, residents of Columbus also lack adequate access to true biblical discipleship and counsel. To help meet this need, Paramount Church offers free biblical counseling by pastors and through the personal ministry of the congregation. The overarching aim is for biblical counsel in its various forms (preaching, small groups, evangelism, etc.) to drive the ministries of the local church for the good of the church's members and those in the surrounding community. This strategy has potential to aid church plants, such as Paramount Church, in accomplishing these aims.

Research Methodology

The project will employ a primarily qualitative research methodology, along with quantitative data collection. Due to the nature of the project as a biblical counseling strategy that examines and

72. 1 Peter 3:14–15.

addresses effectiveness of biblical counseling among four sample types—pastoral leaders, lay counseling leaders, core team membership, and general laity—research majored on verbal not numerical response data. Effectiveness of the project required careful evaluation of biblical counseling knowledge and practice, insight-oriented interviews with church planting leaders, and consistent tracking of strengths, weaknesses, and other needed improvements. The focus group of participating church plants began with the churches belonging to *The North American Church Planting Foundation*.⁷³ Beyond these, invitations to participate in the project were extended to an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 like-minded church plants.

Research limitations resulted from three factors. First, the personal nature of change at which the proposed strategy aims required gathering and interpreting qualitative research. Since the qualitative research of this project required communication and interpretation of primarily soft concepts, rather than hard numbers, assessment of the research was limited by dependence on human understanding and communication of key concepts and ideas. Second, research was limited by the sampling of church plants. Looking forward, implementation of the strategy will require the new church starts embrace and welcome biblical counseling on even an introductory level.

The scope of the project was aimed at assisting church plants having a foundational commitment to pursue biblical counseling in the local church. Since the project involved implementation of a meaningful strategy, the scope of this project excluded church plants not expressing a willingness to embrace biblical counseling with increasing commitment. Third, research limitation was imposed by the limited period of time in which execution and assessment could take place. Progressive sanctification and cultivation of biblical counseling ministries involve processes that progress over time and

73. *The North American Church Planting Foundation* is a non-profit organization that exists to support and promote church planting efforts in North America. From this point on, I will refer to the organization as *NACPF*.

at varying speeds. Therefore, evaluation of strategy effectiveness and adjustment of the strategy itself must take place beyond the set time for the project research, implementation, and evaluation.

Research Instruments

Two research instruments were employed. The first was a questionnaire of fifty questions, aimed at discovering the current state of biblical counseling among North American church plants. The second was an interview tool consisting of ten questions. The questions explored key issues surrounding the philosophy and practice of biblical counseling among a variety of churches including counseling in their ministries. Unfortunately, in the course of research, some of these interviews were lost through computer failure. The research instruments for the project are located in the appendices.

Chapter Summaries

The main thrust of Chapter 1 is an introduction to the development of the church planting and biblical counseling movements. An account of church planting in history will yield an opportunity to examine the past and current roles of biblical counseling in North American church plants. Subsequently, grounds will be made for considering the development of a strategy to incorporate biblical counseling in the church planting context.

Building upon the historical account of the biblical counseling and church planting movements, in Chapter 2 the author provides biblical theological underpinnings of church planting with special emphasis upon the priority of godly counsel throughout Scripture. Grounded in the doctrines of the sufficiency of Scripture and progressive sanctification through the gospel, an introduction to the theological foundations of biblical counseling will reveal the New Testament precedent for biblical counseling ministry in the expansion of the early Church and modern church planting.

In Chapter 3, the author includes an historical examination of the role of helping ministries within local churches, especially new church starts. The main objective in this examination is to determine the similarities and dissimilarities between the foundations for biblical counseling in Scripture and the role and function of biblical counseling throughout the modern church planting movement. Determining these similarities and dissimilarities will help to sharpen the focus of the project, addressing crucial strengths and weaknesses of modern church plants.

Comprising the bulk of the project, in Chapter 4 the author will detail a careful strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in North American church plants. The strategy will address three primary goals for church plant improvement. One goal of the proposed strategy is the cultivation of a biblical counseling culture within church plants. The purpose here is to establish a biblical counseling mindset that pervades the church plant's ministry DNA. As the church plant vision and strategy is affected and directed by a commitment to biblical counseling value and principles—i.e., doctrines of scriptural sufficiency, progressive sanctification, mutual ministry of the word, and the like—a culture of lasting biblical change and gospel-centered personal ministry is expected.

A second goal is to develop and implement structures to further improve a church plant's ability to incorporate and expand biblical counseling ministry into the life of the congregation. These may include structures such as adjustments of by-laws, improved church leadership organization, counseling forms, and certain legal protections. A third goal of Chapter 4 is to present a detailed plan for equipping pastors, counseling leaders, core team members, and laity to participate effectively in the church plant's overall counseling emphasis. The equipping process depends heavily on a detailed schedule of teaching, training, and practice of counseling philosophy and skills. The specific equipping resources will be down-to-earth and accessible so every member may grow in usefulness, regardless of maturity level or Christian intelligence. Combined together,

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

counseling culture, structures, and equipping will make up the larger strategy for incorporating biblical counseling in the church planting context.

Chapter 5 contains a detailed explanation of research instruments and procedures used in the development and assessment of the biblical counseling strategy, a record of research performed, and an interpretative analysis of research results. The project analysis yields helpful conclusions for future implementation of the biblical counseling strategy for church plants. Suggested additions, deletions, and adjustments to the strategy are proposed and based upon the concluding analysis. Following completion of the project, the author anticipates a detailed revision before the strategy is made available to future sending churches and church plants.