

INTERVIEW

Interview with Alasdair Groves

PETER A. LILLBACK

(September 27, 2022)

PETER A. LILLBACK: *Why don't we begin with a word of prayer?*

Lord, I thank you for this time of fellowship, questioning. And we pray it will be an encouragement for our readers in the arena of biblical counseling and the work that you have called Alasdair Groves to lead. We pray, Lord, that you would give him guidance and wisdom as he shares his recollections and his insights. We pray, Lord, that you will bless your people through this work, and we thank you for the opportunity to serve. We ask it all in Christ's name. Amen.

The topic we are discussing is biblical counseling, which is a unique contribution of the Reformed tradition of Westminster Seminary, with its love for the Scriptures and its attempt to engage life for the glory of God and the good of people ministered to. What is the difference between classical pastoral care and biblical counseling? Pastors have always tried to nurture the souls of their congregants through caring for them in day-to-day and crisis moments through their preaching, but what makes biblical counseling unique from that general pastoral task?

ALASDAIR GROVES: Peter, thank you so much for having me here, for giving me the chance to think about these things together. In general, the biblical counseling movement would want to emphasize continuity with pastoral care through the ages rather than distinction. The distinction would probably be mostly one of history and context rather than of substance. It is probably

an oversimplification, but robust pastoral care in the church vanished off of the playing field in around 1870 and did not reemerge until the mid-1960s with Jay Adams. Some places in more progressive liberal churches had some level of pastoral care before that, maybe in the 1950s, but the true reclaiming of pastoral care for the church was with Adams working at Westminster and realizing that what was being offered in the pastoral care courses and training that he had received elsewhere was essentially at odds with everything he knew about Scripture and the gospel and personal responsibility for sin. So, the fundamental difference biblical counseling brings is that it was born reclaiming something that had been intuitive and understood as part of the fabric of the church from the apostle Paul on through to around the mid to late nineteenth century.

PAL: *Why did you pick the date of 1870? Is there anything specific, or is that just a general era demarcation?*

AG: It is a general era. I do it because David Powlison would speak that way.¹ The 1860s are pre Second Great Awakening; as revivalism caught hold, and the “pray the prayer” attitude was seen as the answer to alcoholism and drunkenness, that caught hold, took root, and had significance. I would date that ethos to post Civil War.

PAL: *What unique contribution did Adams give to the whole discipline of biblical counseling?*

AG: I can do no better than quote Powlison again on that. He himself was a second-generation biblical counselor whom I imagine we will speak of more as we go on. In light of his research into the biblical counseling movement and his personal friendship with Jay, he would describe him as the Martin Luther of biblical counseling—the man who nailed the thesis to the door and said, “What we are doing does not work, and there must be a reclaiming of something that has been lost.”

PAL: *Adams started his work as a seminary professor at Westminster but then began to develop a distinctive ministry. That led to the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF), where you are serving today. How did that come about as he was leading and guiding at that point?*

AG: Jay was a professor at Westminster in the Department of Practical Theology and over time really felt a burden for the training of pastors in

¹ See David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), 11.



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biblical counseling. Particularly, he saw the need for something broader than simply having guys come back to seminary and redo an MDiv or do another degree. He had a vision for equipping and training pastors, which led him to launch a training center, the CCEF. Fairly early on, Jay and his cofounder, John Bettler, worked together to create not just a training body but also a certifying body to oversee this. And so they separated the two institutions to avoid a conflict of interest. Jay took over the certifying arm, which became known as the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, and Bettler stayed with CCEF, the training arm. The initial vision was that the two would be partners, working closely hand in hand over the years.

PAL: *Then, as the program developed, Powlison, who has recently passed away, had an extraordinary career at CCEF. What were his developments of biblical counseling as he took the Luther-like insights of Adams and became a kind of Calvin to the movement?*

AG: It is an apt analogy. David achieved many things, but he functioned as part of a triumvirate with Paul Tripp and Ed Welch. The three of them, in a special way, worked to develop a model. Jay's signature insight was that the church needed to reclaim soul care and in particular needed to restore the dignity and the responsibility of owning your sin in a time when sin had been totally cast off by a secular world. The secular mode of care was essentially to try to work through whatever you were dealing with without ever referencing or dealing with guilt and sin, repentance and forgiveness, and grace and the blood of Christ. All that was wiped off the table, and Jay said, "This is wrong. Taking responsibility for your sin is vital to any hope of health and of life that flourishes." If that was where Jay started, David, Ed, and Paul added a sense of Scripture, speaking to suffering as well. There is a greater complexity than simply repentance for sin; thus, it is not the only central aspect of pastoral care. Scripture is rich with overturning the curse as far as it is found.² And that is certainly true where there is sin and where there is suffering, and we need to have both clearly in mind.

David is maybe best remembered, at least by his students, for what he called the Three Trees Model, which was his attempt to capture in a really cohesive, comprehensive way how Scripture looks at all of human life and how it understands the relationship between suffering, sin, and then the transformation the Spirit works through the gospel.

² Cf. Isaac Watts, "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come" (1719), *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: Great Commission Publication, 1990), #195.

PAL: *Why don't you give us a brief summary of the Three Tree Model.*

AG: David would launch from Jeremiah 17, and he would talk about the picture given there. There is a thornbush in the wilderness (v. 6), and it is dry and ugly and barren, and anybody who walks by is going to get scratched and scraped by it. However, there is also a fruit tree that flourishes even in the baking heat of the sun, planted by streams of water that nourish its roots (v. 8; cf. Ps 1:3), similar to Psalm 1 imagery and other places in Scripture as well: these are pictures of two different ways of life. So, the thornbush represents life lived for self, in opposition to God, and the Jeremiah language is the language of trusting in man versus trusting in the Lord (vv. 5, 7). Because when you trust in man, this is the kind of life that it produces. And he said that the thing that is true of both trees is that they both have to deal with life under a hot sun. So, the circumstances and the difficulties and the trials and the temptations and the strains and stresses of life are actually the same, both for the thornbush and for the fruit tree. But what it takes for a fruit tree to actually bear fruit in season, as opposed to becoming a withered thorny bramble, is for the tree to be enriched by the water of life flowing into its roots. It is not fundamentally about trying harder to bear good fruit. It is fundamentally about being more deeply rooted in a trust in the Lord, who would yield fruit that would last through the work of the Spirit in someone's life. David said that all of life is recognizing where are there thorns still present in my life, and how I grow in the Lord, and lastly, how I become that third tree, which is the cross that allows us to go from death to life, from thorn to fruit.

PAL: *Another key theme that has been developed through the years is the nature of the human heart to create idols that we put above other things. How does the idea of the heart being an idol factory,³ to use a phrase Calvin developed years ago, fit into biblical counseling?*

AG: Yes, the language of idolatry has been helpful. It is certainly not original to biblical counseling. That language goes as back as far as you want—obviously in Scripture, but also in church history. The beauty of that language of idols in biblical counseling is that it gives a way of capturing the stumbling blocks in the heart. The idea is that anything we give our worship to other than God is going to produce and yield behaviors of obedience to that idol rather than to the Lord. So you must worship something, and you will

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 65, 108 (1.5.12; 1.11.8); see also David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 152, 265.

worship something, and whatever you worship will determine how you then act and behave. Thus, the language of idolatry is a great way to capture what it is that has really won your heart, where your desires and affections are drawn. The reason it has been helpful for biblical counselors is that it gives an image, a category, that helps people realize that many of the things they are distressed by exist because they have allowed an idol to claim the throne of their heart.

It is worth mentioning that over time we have actually seen some significant problems in the biblical counseling movement from an overuse of the idolatry paradigm. In fact, biblical counselors at times have been known for becoming idol hunters, and the only category they seem to have sometimes is “If something is hard for you, must be that you have an idol.” For instance, if you are sad, or discouraged, or afraid, the only possible way we can help you is saying, “Well, what is your idol? How do you repent of it? And then you will not care so much about this difficult thing.” David himself wrote some things in contrast to the overrealization of the language of idolatry.⁴ But yes, it is a brilliantly rich way to get at the fundamental problem that human beings are constantly giving their worship away, and that is going to drive behavior into places of sin and wickedness and self-deception.

PAL: *How did biblical counseling, and then ultimately CCEF, become part of your ministry personally?*

AG: I grew up the son of a Westminster professor. I was at church with Powlison and Welch, and what was going on at CCEF enormously influenced our church. I did not realize that as a kid at the time, but I grew up in a place where my parents were pouring into me questions of “What is going on in your heart? What are you desiring?” Not just “Are you doing the right or wrong thing?” but “How does what you are doing intersect with the love of Jesus for you and the forgiveness that he has for you? And how does that shape what you are wanting here?” So I came out of high school into college with a passion to sit and have conversations about the Bible and the struggles in life and connect those two. And somewhere through college, I realized this is what I love to do and what I was doing every minute when I was not in class or playing ultimate Frisbee or doing my homework. Then I thought, *I should maybe really consider doing this, because I have to do something for a job.* And so, as I began to explore what biblical counseling is,

⁴ See David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27.3 (2013): 37–68; see also David Powlison’s chapter, “I Am Motivated When I Feel Desire,” in *Seeing with New Eyes*, 145–62, esp. 158–59.

I had a conversation with Welch and began to read some of Powlison's materials. I was just captivated, and it felt like it was putting words to so many things I had always felt or sensed, and it brought structure and clarity to what was intuitive from my upbringing. Eventually, that led to Westminster and to CCEF to explore if this was really a career. Every day and in every class, from Greek to thinking about how Scripture speaks to matters of schizophrenia, I just felt more and more that this was what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be. I have never looked back.

PAL: *Your father was an Old Testament professor, and your mother teaches Hebrew at Westminster. How does Hebrew impact you personally? Is that something you find yourself engaging with in your work of biblical counseling?*

AG: My background and learning Hebrew have greatly impacted me. I probably have a love for the Old Testament that may seem odd to many outside the seminary world. Some of that is what I learned from my parents and some from my seminary training in Hebrew about how understanding language helps you get inside the mindset of a different people of a different time.

I am not a Hebrew scholar myself, but I really have found a knowledge of Hebrew helpful, especially when exploring Hebrew poetry. It is impossible for English translations to bring across the sheer conciseness, the sheer punch, that the Hebrew poetry has in the original, with some of the inner resonances and the ways that they play with language. One phrase in Psalm 88, verse 15, is a word play in Hebrew. One line says, "I am weak, I have been weak," but in the Hebrew, it says, *'ani 'ani* [lit., afflicted I], which are two different words, but they sound almost exactly the same, and the feeling is, "I am weakness." That is, my weakness rhymes with me and with whom I am. Just the way that parts of the Hebrew text capture these things is powerful because they are so condensed as Scripture brings them across.

Also, my favorite book of the Bible is Judges. I speak about it often in counseling. It is my favorite book because it is not the last book of the Bible. It should be the last book, with that horrible ending and the darkest moment when Israel has become Sodom and Gomorrah and everyone is doing whatever they feel like [cf. Judg 21:25]; it is sin absolutely having completely counteracted the people of God. But then, the Bible goes on, and the redemptive strait does not end there. If the story can continue after the Book of Judges, your story is not yet over, and life is not beyond redemption.

PAL: *If you were to summarize the leading practical principles of biblical counseling that a lay person should know, how would you distill what biblical counseling is?*

AG: Three places leap to my mind, into my heart, as I think about capturing the essentials. Number one would be that no struggle, no temptation, no evil has beset you except that which is common to man [cf. 1 Cor 10:13]. The implication is that you are going to hear things that you will not resonate with and identify with: you may not have any idea what it is like to be hooked on heroin because you have never done any illegal drugs in your life, but if you listen hard enough to someone's story, you will hear in them things where you can say, "I do understand that temptation and the pressure on your heart. We are humans. We share the same set of fundamental struggles to run away from the Lord and to trust in ourselves rather than to trust in him." And so I always want to be able to say "we" with the person: "Yeah, this is hard for us." Therefore, principle number one is humility and good listening, and an awareness of the human heart, and your own heart and your own struggles; you do not know this person well enough to help them very well until you can say "we" with them. That would be the place I would start.

The second place says you do not know everything about this person. Your experience will not be exactly the same as theirs, and the fact that you may be able to say "we" does not mean that your job is done or that you just need to tell them what was helpful for you. I remember early on, ... I think the second person I ever counseled as an intern. We had shockingly similar life experiences. We were both the oldest of four or five kids. We were a year or two apart. We had both lost our fathers to cancer in the recent past. And yet none of my experience was helpful to him at all. He was dealing with totally different things in his grief than I was in mine, and Scripture went in very different ways towards him than it had done towards me. So while principle number one is to keep asking questions until you can say "we" with the person who is struggling, principle number two is everyone's story of redemption, everyone's struggle, is going to be different, and we ask, "Where does the Lord meet them?" It is not how you get to some abstract principle or some formula, since change follows a path, not a script.

The last thing I would say is, when in doubt, move toward the other person; do not run away. Do not assume the task is too much and too hard; do not back off when you hear something difficult, ugly, painful, or foolish. When the other person has made their own bed and they are lying in it and they are mourning on that bed, that is not a time to turn away in disgust. Even then, like Christ having compassion over Jerusalem [cf. Matt 23:37], who was about to crucify him, and to whom he had just recited this long list of woes. We want to have a constant attitude of moving toward people who are struggling. And if I am not sure what to do, then I get help, but I still move toward.

PAL: *How does a person begin to use the Scriptures in their own personal counseling when working on sanctifying growth and learning to use the Scriptures to deal with struggles, sin, and failures? What insights can you offer for people who are learning to say, “I need to counsel myself, I need to take the Scriptures and own up to things”?*

AG: Our first course in our curriculum is the Dynamics of Biblical Change, which Powlison taught for many years, and which I have now inherited. I often tell people it is actually not a counseling class but a Christian life, personal change class, and what is vital is where people would start. You start with yourself. You cannot be equipped to counsel until you have grappled with your own heart before the Lord, until you know something about what change actually looks like and actually requires.

So how do you begin to access the Scriptures for yourself? At the most basic level, I think about what was most helpful to me and led me toward biblical counseling: I would start with any passage of Scripture telling you something about who God is, and, in light of that, the implications for who you are and the implications for how you could grow. So, rather than seeing the Scripture as an encyclopedia or compendium of prooftexts or instructions—that if you just memorize enough verses, you will know the right thing to do in this situation or that—I would want to drive people toward a more redemptive historical approach⁵ and one that constantly looks back to who is the Lord, that sort of indicative-to-imperative move, with which I imagine many of the readers of this journal would be familiar.⁶ So there is no magic, no new insight from me or biblical counseling other than to say the Scripture is an open invitation to bring all of life to Scripture, and if you are finding difficulties, seeing how it leads, how you understand the Lord’s movement.

Then you go and speak in humility to someone else in the body of Christ and say, “Will you help me understand?” The Christian life—in particular, wrestling with your trials and your temptations—is not a solo endeavor. That is where a lot of us, maybe, lose the thread: “If I just listen to good enough preaching,” or “If I just work hard enough to have a good quiet time,” or “If I just try enough to be a good person and respectable in my community, that is mostly what I need, and it is not worth opening up my heart to someone else who would be willing to sit with me and process these

⁵ Cf., e.g., Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 24–28.

⁶ For an introduction to the indicative and imperative in Paul, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 77–85.

things.” That is where I would say, “If you are having these questions and finding any level of struggle, by all means speak about it with someone else.” We all need encouragement and accountability. We all need challenge, insight, wisdom, and support from others.

PAL: *Where do people get to know more about CCEF? What is available that might actually help me be a better pastor, become more of a biblically minded counselor, or just grow as a human being, to be more faithful? What would you recommend to your reading audience?*

AG: I would give a layered set of answers. The beauty of what CCEF is trying to do is that we are simply trying to say what has been here in Scripture all along, and we are just trying to unlock new pieces of it in a new sense of application for each new generation. The church is confronted with different things in every era, and we want to think well about the hardest of those dark spots in human life. So, in anything you are doing—whether it has anything to do with CCEF or not—that moves in the direction of thinking through how Scripture really gets into the nitty-gritty of human life, you are running down the right path.

Regarding specific CCEF resources, you can go to ccef.org. We have got a blog, podcasts, videos, years of conference audio, and books. So there are resources with various levels of depth and interest. A huge piece of what we have developed over the years is our certificate program. We have endeavored to hone that down to what committed engaged disciples of the church need, what the lay leaders of a church, the elders, need as they seek to love others. The two certificates[, the Formation Certificate and the Essentials of Biblical Counseling Certificate,]⁷ are intended to equip people who are trying to live life, lead small groups, and be engaged in pastoral care in the church.

Westminster itself offers a Master of Arts in Counseling that has taken many resources developed over the years at CCEF and is using those to equip vocational counselors. Obviously, members of our faculty made contributions to that program. We were excited about the collaboration you have invited us into in the program that you run. So we would love to see more and more people end up in the master’s programs at Westminster, getting in-depth, robust training for the next generation of biblical counselors, who will go and be in the trenches and lead the movements and continue to develop further resources and training.⁸

⁷ “Courses,” CCEF, 2023, <https://www.ccef.org/school/courses/#programs>.

⁸ “Master of Arts in Counseling,” Westminster Theological Seminary, 2022, <https://www.wts.edu/programs/mac>.

PAL: *What are some of Westminster's distinctives as a seminary that were applied by Adams and Powlison and yourself in developing biblical counseling? Are there any of the unique things of the seminary that have been fruitful tools in the application of the Scriptures to the deeds of people?*

AG: I suspect there is probably vastly more than I even know and appreciate, but I will name two that have had landscape-shaping, paradigm-setting impacts for biblical counseling. Here, I am unsure where the boundary lines lie between Adams and Powlison in terms of how this emphasis played out, and Bettler as well, but I would say that the following two distinctives at Westminster have been such gifts to CCEF and to biblical counseling in general.

Number one would be the redemptive historical approach to Scripture, the unfolding of Scripture, how it builds, and the intersection of biblical theology and systematic theology, the way that those are meant to be partners, not antagonists—they shaped biblical counseling. It has encouraged us overwhelmingly again and again as biblical counselors. Powlison, Welch, Tripp, and Mike Emlet have all given voice to this. This perspective has pushed the relational dynamic and its Christocentric character—everything focused on Christ. That does not just mean that he tells you what to do or that he is the crowning example; rather, this is the relational dynamic of a God who has sought and saved and is active in history. So redemptive history and the way that drives you towards a covenantal relational approach to understanding people's problems and the solutions to help them is visible in how in biblical counseling your job as a counselor is to help someone walk through something hard with the Good Shepherd in the valley of the shadow of death [cf. Ps 23:4], rather than to fix the situation.

The other piece, which in some ways may have had an even greater impact, although it is hard to have a greater impact than what I have just described, is the presuppositional apologetics that came obviously most fundamentally from Cornelius Van Til.⁹ What I began to perceive as I went through my own MDiv, and what now is blatantly obvious to me as I read those who have come before me in biblical counseling, is that presuppositional thinking is vital—recognizing both a point of contact with nonbelievers and this incredible gap between thinking that is rooted in Scripture and in trust in the Lord versus what rejects him.¹⁰ The fundamental idea that your presuppositions

⁹ For more on the impact of presuppositional apologetics on biblical counseling, see Jim Newheiser, "Presuppositions of Biblical Counselors," and Michael Gembola, "A Pastoral Framework for Infidelity Counseling," in this issue of the journal.

¹⁰ For a good introduction to Van Til on "The Point of Contact" and presuppositional method, see Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), esp. 38–58, 61–65.

shape everything comes up in every single counseling conversation I ever have. I am constantly doing presuppositional apologetics, even with Christians, uncovering places where their own presuppositions and blind spots are shaping their perception of the Lord and who they are, how they are responding or should respond, and their understanding of what is fair, right, and appropriate. So, biblical counseling in its work with Scripture is linked to redemptive historical thinking; in its actual conversational sound, it probably sounds quite different from Van Til having a debate with some secular humanist, but the conversational core is constantly overflowing from a presuppositional apologetics mindset that says, “We want radical consistency between what we find in Scripture, every ounce of the universe being the Lord’s, and the places where we so easily and quickly depart from it in ways we are blind to.”

PAL: *Has biblical counseling been able to move beyond the North American context in which it was born? Is it now a global movement? What shape is it taking elsewhere?*

AG: It has really been wonderful to see, from my own anecdotal experience, how something has begun to really tilt in the last ten years to a significant and regular and rich development. Some of that may be the availability of digital resources that were not there before. I knew someone who was a missionary in Mexico for many years translating work into Spanish.¹¹ I think she always felt it was hard, training individuals but not seeing it break through as hoped. What has happened in publishing, digital resources, and media in the past decade is exploding in the Spanish-speaking world, and in a number of countries such as the Dominican Republic, a couple of places in Central and South America, in Quebec, in Canada, and in France and the rest of the French-speaking world. It is actually something that has been sparking in Ukraine for a little while and moving into the Russian-speaking world. We have had a significant relationship with an organization in India for a number of years, and we are watching that grow and watching people come for training and go back to India and see that expand. In the rest of the English-speaking world, there is much happening in Australia, and the movement in the United Kingdom has really come into its own in the last five years. So biblical counseling has really gone global, and it is sweet to get to the point where already we are beginning to see places where those outside the United States are writing, thinking, and teaching in ways that we here appreciate.

¹¹ See Natalie Carley’s article in this issue, “Biblical Counseling in the Spanish Speaking World.”

PAL: *Where do you see biblical counseling going in the coming years or decades? What would you like to see happen as you look to the future if the Lord should be pleased to fulfill your vision?*

AG: Well, if you are asking me in the long run, I will answer big. First, I would love to think that in forty years there would be many people who say, “We owe such a debt of gratitude to CCEF.” Rather than having CCEF on every street corner and CCEF being the brand, I would love to see biblical counseling be vastly bigger than CCEF, and it already is. But I would love to see us continue to be a planter of seeds, a waterer of seeds, see the movement grow, and see each nation, each language group, have wise, mature, thoughtful teachers in their own language, their own organizations. That has already happened in many places. I am speaking of something that is already in motion. That is not a wishful-thinking dream down the road. So, I hope that CCEF would be in the midst of something that would continue to vastly outgrow and outpace us.

I would love to see us take what we already have in the courses we have developed and continue to add to them both in book form and in class form, particularly for challenging issues. Taking what we have applied broadly and generally (e.g., issues of anger) and then driving it into particular aspects of more specific situations, continuing to push forward into high-end, intricate-level thinking, and to see all our resources become more and more widely available in different languages. So we have already translated a few things into Russian. We have translated a few things into French. There are various books that have been translated into a number of languages, but I would love to see our entire program accessible in dozens of languages. And honestly, forty years from now, I actually hope that in many cases no one is really using these translations because the training that is actually native to those places—that is, contextualized, not just in terms of the language, but also in terms of the examples and pastoral issues. I hope there would be such good teaching on the ground in those places that nobody bothers to come to look for the archives but recognizes that there are local partners who could do it better than we could ever hope to.

PAL: *I can add that as I have traveled in other parts of the world like South Korea and Indonesia, I have witnessed their real desire to see biblical counseling be expanded and developed. It is quite advanced in some of the universities that are Christian in character in South Korea. I know that seminaries in Indonesia are working on it. So the global reality is quite remarkable. As we wrap up our time, do you have any final thoughts?*

AG: One thing I will say beyond what we have already said is, I spoke about

Adams as a line-in-the-sand guy, the Luther, and I appreciate your connection to Calvin as picturing Powlison. If Adams said the church must reclaim soul care and Powlison said the model needs to get all of life, not just sin and repentance, I wonder if the next generation's task is going to be to firm up a methodology more carefully and more clearly. There are plenty of methodological thoughts that have come over the years, and there are, I think, aspects of the biblical counseling movement that would have a focus on various methodologies. However, it is my personal belief that more is needed in finding a way to speak of the incredible flexibility, the radical freedom that we have, and that Scripture gives us in terms of the many different ways to point someone to Christ and counsel someone to walk through difficult times. We can give a more comprehensive methodology to biblical counseling, rather than just simply an endless list of tools or advice to love the person, read Scripture together, and apply it to each individual differently. I think we need something in the center that is more defined, and I do not think we have yet achieved that. So, that will be the task of this generation.

PAL: *Thank you, Alasdair, for your time, for your leadership, and for your connection with this seminary. Could I ask you to conclude us in prayer for God to bless the conversation we have had?*

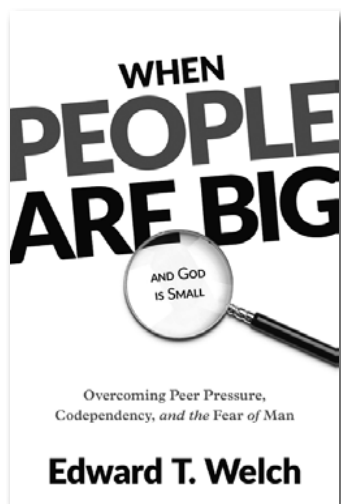
AG: I would be honored to do that, and I am deeply grateful to you for inviting me on and for all the work you are doing to get this kind of thinking and material out to people around the world. So yes, let me pray.

Heavenly Father, would you be pleased indeed to bless not just this one conversation, but the thousands upon thousands of conversations that your people have daily with one another. Lord, would you be present in our words and in our hearts. May we indeed run first and foremost to you. May we know what it is to grow and to be sanctified, that we might have something with which to comfort others, with which to encourage, with which to challenge, with which to love in every aspect of our speaking.

So, Lord, would you richly bless Westminster, would you bless all the different programs that Westminster runs, would you bless CCEF as we seek to counsel and to learn more deeply how to train others to counsel. Would you bless the readers of this journal, as each of them, in their particular context, knows intimately and deeply what it is to be faced with a person who is resistant to change, struggling to change, trying with all their might, and pouring their heart out before the Lord,

and doing everything right, and still experiencing deep suffering. Lord, the many different situations that confront us are common, and yet each of them is different. And we ask, Lord, would you give mercy to us, as we seek to encourage, love, support, and engage each other in ways that really are true to Scripture. Would you guard us against being Job's friends, who have one answer and miss the person and abstract our theology from life. Instead, may we be people for whom theology is just our heartbeat, and it leads us to this strong, courageous, gentle, loving application of your word to the very hardest places we encounter in ourselves and others. Would you do this in all of us, for the glory of your name, and for the blessing and the strengthening of your church, we pray. Amen.

WISE COUNSEL



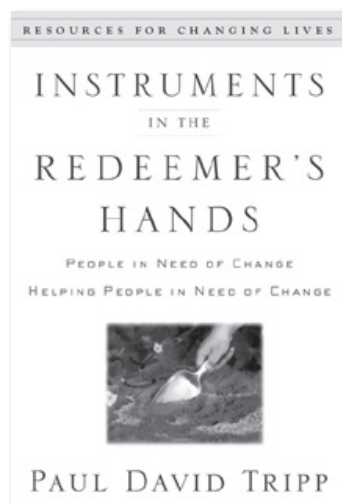
“Welch’s book *When People Are Big and God Is Small* helped me when it first released in 1997, and its insights never stray far from my mind. I celebrate the new lease of life that this revised version represents.”

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