

Introduction to Biblical Counseling – BC 300

PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT GUIDELINES

You could use this project as a part of your daily devotional exercise during the time of the course.

- 1). Select one problem or issue in your own life** on which you want to work on improving during this course. Perhaps it will be an issue in your life with which you have the greatest trouble, one in which you sense a real deficiency; or maybe it will be a problem that is of most interest to you; or maybe it represents an issue that has challenged you most. Unlike most of the papers you will write in college this is not a research paper that requires library searches and original source material. This is a paper about you! You will never understand biblical counseling until you understand the importance of personal change and growth in the Christian life. Encompassing your entire semester you will embark, maybe for the first time in your life, on a mission of personal improvement focused on one sinful tendency (or bad habit that is the fruit of sin). This is an excellent opportunity for you to work on an area in your life that you have known needs to change in order to be more like Jesus Christ.

Complete the Psalm 18 study and follow the instructions on the “Drawing out the Purposes of the Heart” study to get ideas of the area you believe the Lord would like you to work on. Turn this in on the assigned date. If you have a hard time identifying what your heart motivations are, please read the “X-ray questions” article on the course home page to guide your thinking. You will receive feedback from Dr. Baker or the class grader on the themes they are seeing. All your answers are confidential unless a major issue comes up that must be addressed by church leadership. Major issues would be things like unrepentant immorality.

You may pick what appears to be a relatively minor habit: e.g., biting your fingernails or forgetfulness of some kind as long as you also clearly identify what the “heart” worship themes are also. Or you may choose a more major pattern of wrong thinking, behaving, speech, emotions - a tendency to be withdrawn, uptight, evasive, aggressive, controlling, competitive, pushy, demanding, judgmental, negative, critical, a tendency to want to be the center of attention, a tendency to show off or try to impress people, a tendency to be works righteous or performance oriented in your school work, in your evaluation of people, in your evaluation of worth and value.

If you choose to work on what many would consider a small bad habit it may lead you to more substantial issues. Working on biting your finger nails may lead you to how handle tension in general. Investigation of and progress in a rather insignificant area of life may have ripple effects in other areas of life.




On the other hand, more general problems have the advantage of bringing more of your whole life into the light of God’s Word. If you choose a larger issue you will need to break it down into particular actions, attitudes, thoughts and feelings that manifest the

problem. Remember, an avalanche is made of millions of snowflakes. Fundamental changes in attitudes, motives and desires have ripple effects.


Here are some samples of issues you might want to deal with:

- Driving habits: your driving may provide a microcosm of your life style. How do you handle traffic jams?
- The way you play sports or approach almost any endeavor. Sports do not build character, they reveal it (only the Holy Spirit using the Word builds holy character). Sports or school or work habits can be a wonderful window into your pride, fears, competitiveness, anger, performance orientation, fantasy, laziness, lack of self control, concern to outdo or impress others, unbiblical standards, etc.
- Anxiety: how do you handle pressure, stress, disappointment, rejection, demands, etc.? How do you handle it when life seems out of control?
- Sex and romance: daydreaming, lust, fantasizing, voyeurism, immoral thoughts and actions, etc.
- Fears of people: desire to be applauded, approved, accepted, fear of criticism, rejection, failure, etc.
- Do you lie, flatter, manipulate, brag, cower, avoid, become silent, compliant, etc.? Would people say you are a controlling person? Are you pushy, suspicious, confident or cowardly around people?
- Are you self-absorbed: focusing on your own opinions, agenda, desires, fears, concerns, interests? Do you talk too much? Do you frequently take things personally? Do you regard disagreement as a rejection of you? Do you consider your ideas to be better than the ideas of others?
- How do you relate to authority? Parents, teachers/professors, church leaders, bosses, police, umpires, referees, etc.? Are you rebellious and self willed? How do you respond when their ideas and decisions differ with yours? How do you respond emotionally, behaviorally, verbally, cognitively, for example, when a teacher doesn't give you the grade you think you deserve?
- How do you respond to being sinned against, when you are wronged, betrayed, maligned, criticized unjustly, hurt by other people?
- Are you easily irritated, upset, worried over adverse circumstances, financial pressures, unrealized goals, foolish people, etc.?
...These are just a few examples of possible counseling issues; there could be many others. Think about it carefully.

You must turn in both the initial and the PIP CONTRACT in this syllabus on the dates assigned (see *Assignment Schedule* for Due Date)

- 2). **Complete the “A Plan for Change” (PIP Contract) sheet on course home page.** By  **answering these questions precisely you are developing your plan. This is your PIP.**
- 3). **Turn in the initial plan for change on the assigned date.** The professor or grader will go over your plan in detail and make suggestions. After receiving the suggestions to fine tune your project, then turn in your final PIP Contract. 
- 4). **Keep a journal/diary of what happens in your life in this area throughout the course.** Record specific occasions when the problem surfaces or when you are tempted. Keep this diary or journal *at least twice a week*. You will have approximately 8 weeks to work on this. 
- 5). **In this journal/diary record the salient features in your situation.** What did you say, do, feel, think? What were your controlling motives, desires? What are relevant biblical passages that illuminate the situation, define the problem, expose motives, and

point to solutions? You can also use this as an opportunity to write out a prayer to the Lord concerning what you are working on.

6). Apply information from this course, other counseling courses and your reading to the particular problem you have chosen. Let honest prayer and honest thinking work in tandem. Use class discussions and reading to spur your understanding of and solution to this problem. 

7). Type a four to five page summary report (double spaced) of this Personal Improvement Project to be turned in on the date indicated on the Assignment Schedule. Give salient details from items 1 through 6 of this project. Then evaluate and assess where you think you've come, what change has taken place, what changes yet remain, where you have and haven't made progress, the reasons for your failure to make more progress, what the obstacles have been, what obstacles still remain, how your tackling this issue has affected your ministry, what your plans are in reference to this issue for the future and anything else you think relevant.

Fill this report with good, tight, insightful, specific, fact filled descriptive paragraphs on parts 1-6 of these instructions. Make sure give specifics about what you planned to do, what you actually did, how what you did worked, what happened and what you plan to do once the course is over. Comment on what has happened in your life or ministry through focusing on this personal improvement project, how far have you come, what obstacles have you faced, what changes have taken place, how it has affected your ministry to others, and anything else that seems relevant.

In this paper, be very specific in terms of the insights you have gained, challenges you have received, applications you have made and plans for improving.

Give yourself an assessment number on a scale of 1-5 (1 Low, 5 high). 1 would equal you hardly worked on it; 3 would equal, I worked on this weekly; 5 equals, I worked on this regularly and consistently.

On the due date of the PIP, you will also hand in your journal. The professor will spot-check a few sample pages and the diary will be considered strictly confidential. Please keep this journal on a computer rather than a separate book and attach the printed out pages to your final report. 