

Biblical Counseling Training 101

Class 10 – Step Six: Assigning Well-Targeted Homework

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Tim. 2:15

I. Assign Homework for Which You Hold Them Accountable

A. Rationale

1. Biblical emphasis on “**doing**” reflects biblical commands. For example, Mark Carey pointed out in a sermon that there are *40 commands* in Ephesians 4-6 alone!
2. It brings hope for change at the beginning. Doing what God says brings hope as people see God’s promises provide peace and encouragement. It is like Matthew 7:24-27, “*Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house; it fell with a great crash.*”
3. Puts responsibility for work, growth and change on counselee. For example, see Ephesians 4:1. “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called...*”
4. Talk without work actually works against growth and change. James 1:22, “*Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*”
5. Helps people replace bad habits with better habits.
6. Continues the application of truth between sessions. 2 Peter 1:5-8 says, “*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”
7. Makes more apparent who does / doesn’t want to change. If I am counseling someone who continues not to do homework that has been well-designed for them and for their situation, I am pretty sure they are not interested in “*working out their salvation with fear and trembling*” as we are commanded in Philippians 2:13. After making sure I haven’t given them something they can’t do and giving them a few tries, I am likely to stop meeting with them because they are not investing as much as I am.

B. Procedures

1. Use specific scripture. When possible, use scripture that defines sinful thinking and behavior and then encourages the way to overcome. (Romans 12:9-21, an example)
2. Begins before first session if intake is used; first session otherwise
3. Preferably use carbonless duplicates for homework. See example.
4. Be very specific about homework. Randy Patton, executive director of NANC says, “*People don’t change in Fuzzyland.*”

5. Good homework is not, “Be sure to have your devotions this week.” Instead, it might be, “*Read through 1 John and note the characteristics of a person who is walking in the light. Evaluate how well that describes you, and be prepared to share why you say that.*”
6. Be sure to deal with both their thinking and behavior. (See 6d below)
7. Use homework as the agenda you will follow for the next session
8. Include
 - a. Selected scripture reading. Be ready to ask them to discuss.
 - b. Meaningful scripture memory. Have them do it for you word perfect. If they don't get it, give them the passage again. This reinforces “**verbal plenary inspiration**” – the idea that God breathed the very words chosen in the original manuscripts, not merely the ideas. (**Sloppy memory will normally translate to someone not using it.**)
 - c. Reading or listening material that explains biblical thinking related to the problem
 - d. **Activities** that point them in a direction of **godly conduct**. Usually believe → good behavior, but sometimes behave → good thinking.
 - e. Emphasize church attendance, small group, adult classes or Bible studies and taking notes, since all of that helps them develop the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:2, 1 Cor. 2:16, Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:2, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Heb. 10:24-25)
 - f. Give them specific prayer direction
9. Gather additional data – it's an ongoing process of discovery!
You might have them fill in a Journal of Upsets, or of anger, or of depression, anxiety, sexual sin, etc. to analyze why, how, when, length, who affected, how manifested, etc.
10. Another good component of homework is utilizing the other spiritual input in their life.
so they can see how God is bringing it all together. That may involve having them give you a 2-3 minute response to this week's sermon or this week's Bible study or books.
11. Assign reading or listening material that explains biblical principles pertinent to their problems. *Example:* “Read chapter 6 and write down at least one example a day where you specifically applied these principles to real life situations.”
12. Good homework resource examples

Our identity in Christ:
The Cross Centered Life, C.J. Mahaney
Victory Over Darkness, Neil Anderson
The Marvelous Exchange, Dick Flaten
The Gospel Primer, Milton Vincent

Hope:
Trusting God, Jerry Bridges
You Can Trust God, Jerry Bridges (booklet)

How to change:
Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, Paul David Tripp
How People Change, Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp
Gospel Treason, Brad Bigney

Marriage:
Marriage Builder, Larry Crabb
Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas
What Did You Expect, Paul David Tripp
When Mercy and Marriage Collide, Brad Bigney (sermon series at graceky.org)

Exemplary Husband, Stuart Scott
The Excellent Wife, Martha Peace
Helper by Design, Elyse Fitzpatrick

Parenting:

Shepherding A Child's Heart, Tedd Tripp
Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens, Paul David Tripp
Heart of Anger, Lou Priolo

Anxiety and Fear:

Keep a Quiet Heart, Elisabeth Elliot
Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety, Elyse Fitzpatrick
When People Are Big and God Is Small, Ed Welch (a response to co-dependency)

Communication, conflict and forgiveness:

War of Words, Paul David Tripp
The Peacemaker, Ken Sande

13. Analyzing behavioral problems from the perspective of the heart.
Example: Write 5 possible desires in your heart that lead you to communicate that way? What does God think of those desires?
14. Focusing on the glory of Christ and your position in Him.
Example: Read Ephesians 1-3 and note at least 10 truths about our identity in Christ.
15. Assign church, small group, adult Bible classes and sermon note-taking and their application to life.
16. Give specific and concrete prayer direction.
17. Pray for yourself; often, specifically and humbly.

II. Discussion

1. What are some purposes for homework?
2. How do you decide specifics?
3. Consider a young woman who has been deserted by her husband. She has two young children, is financially stretched and is beginning to doubt that God is there for her.
 - a. How could you use Psalm 23 to give biblical instruction?
 - b. How would you give homework for Psalm 23?
 - c. What else would you want to give her?

III. Homework

- A. Memorize 2 Timothy 2:15
- B. Read pages 5-6 of these notes
- C. Assign homework on page four for either the male or the female on the case above under II 3. For the female, women, give her homework besides the discussion examples above. For the male, guys, pretend that the guy who left her has come to you and is admitting he is unsure about what to do. He is frustrated being pinned down, frustrated that the baby takes so much attention and time, and just wants to feel less pressure. He is actually a Christian and is struggling with guilt after having left.

Counseling Assignment

Date: _____ Session #: _____

Name(s): _____

1. Pray *specifically* for the counseling process at least 3x this week

- Pray for yourself that God would help you see what He wants you to see about yourself - and where you need to repent, change and grow.
- Pray for your counselor to depend on the Lord, to have His wisdom and insight and to discern where to work/what to do.
- Pray for your spouse (if marriage counseling) to be encouraged in the Lord, in the counseling process and by the changes being made in your life.
- Pray together as a couple – Husband: you initiate the prayer time.

2. Set up and maintain a journal or notebook to jot down things you are learning each day, as well as specific prayers and Bible passages being read. Homework that is not to be turned in should be done in this journal. In your journal, record principles from sermons, Bible reading and other studies you can apply to your life now and be ready to share them in the counseling session.

3. Attend: Sunday Worship Small Group Other _____

4. Bible Reading: _____

Read the scripture passage(s) at least _____ different times. Don't sit down and read it all in one sitting. Record in your journal the day/time you read it. Write in your journal anything that stands out to you from that Bible reading and be prepared to share it with your counselor.

5. Memorize word perfect the following verse/s and be ready to explain: _____

6. Other:

- a.
- b.

- Read the chapters, booklet or article designated above, highlighting or underlining sentences that impact you, and come next time prepared to share the _____ most meaningful statements.
- Listen to or watch _____.
- Write a 100 word summary of the reading, CD or DVD and how it applies to you.

7. Additional:

Charges: _____

Next Appointment: _____

Our Part in Biblical Change: Trust + Prayer + Bible Study + Correct Thinking + Effort (I Timothy 4:6-10)

Appendix: Using Homework Effectively

Randy Patten, former director of NANC (now ACBC)

There are SIX THINGS we want to be a part of our counselees' lives as disciples when we're finished – so you should start pointing to those six things in the very first session. Therefore include these things in every homework assignment:

1. We want them to be reading the Scripture daily

Ask “How many times did you read the Bible this last week?” (most common answer = 0 or 1) Also ask “How many times did you read the Bible the week before?” (ask this because sometimes when someone's in a crisis they'll pull out the Bible and start reading it – but that's not the normal pattern in their life).

Assign them places in the Bible to read each week

For example: Read Matthew 5, 6, 7 at least 3x this week. Record the day and time you did it and write out the most meaningful verse from each day's reading and be ready to discuss it – how it applies to your life. It should take about 30 minutes each time.

Ask, “Do you have time this week to read God's Word? It'll transform your life. In this passage are the principles that can transform your marriage. I want you to be looking for them and come ready to discuss what you've seen.”

2. God's Word IN them - Scripture memory and meditation

The Scripture IN us helps us live righteously (Psalm 119:11), so let's get it into our counselees during our times together. By the end of our counseling time together they should know 9-11 verses word perfect – and where they're found. They should also be able to explain the verse and how it applies to their life.

By the way, God hasn't promised to bless **Scripture memory**. He's promised to **bless meditation** – and when you try to memorize a verse it slows you down and forces you to think about it phrase by phrase so that you can commit it to memory – and God will bless you for that. Here is how you have them do it:

- Quote the passage perfectly
- Explain what it means
- Tell how it relates to their life

3. Theological reading – good books, pamphlets, booklets to help understand the Bible

4. Regular church attendance

Require them to attend two svcs. / week – Sunday am worship and SS or a small group during the week. Biblical counseling is short term – so they need to be a part of the long term general discipleship of a good church. You want to help them develop the habit of plugging into a good church.

Ask them to take notes on the sermon – and be ready to apply what they've learned and how it applies to their life.

5. “Doing”

Right from the very first meeting you want to assign them some practical task or “Doing” assignment.

For example:

- If marriage is the problem: This week I want you each to do 3 ‘loving deeds’ over and above what you would normally do. Record the date and the activity for me
- If parenting is problem: Spend ½ hr. with the child on 2 occasions more than normal. Record the date and activity
- If single: Do 3 acts of kindness to someone else over and above what you normally do in a week
- If shy / low self-esteem: Initiate a conversation with someone on 3 different occasions – asking them questions about themselves

Get them doing something right away.

- Best “Doing” assignment for marriage – Plan one date / week – alternating responsibilities for planning it. A “date” is a pleasing activity, lasting at least two hours, without children. Have the man start first. You plan it this week. Ask the woman to get the family calendar and mark on it each of their names on Sunday each week – alternating every other week. Doesn't have to involve money. Make sure it's something that is pleasing to your mate when it's your turn to plan the date.

6. Consistent prayer life

In session #1 ask them – Pray on 3 occasions this week.

Pray 3 things each time you pray:

- a. Pray for yourself in this process – that you'll be teachable, humble, have a learner spirit, willing to change. Really cry out to God for your own heart
- b. Pray for your spouse – that God would give them hope and courage to do what God shows them to do
- c. Pray for me (the counselor) to have wisdom and use our time wisely and know what the issues are we need to address