

Sermon Title: Take Every Thought Captive (New Year 2024, #1)
Scripture Text: Various

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-7-24

I want to welcome you—and especially if you are *new* to Heritage Bible Church, this might be something new to you: This is my one-week-delayed version of the 2024 Annual New Year Message. This year, more than ever, I have been collecting things through the year that I thought would fit well into a New Year sermon—and so, there are probably going to be three this year, and we will get started today.

The thread that connects these New Year sermons over 30-plus years is that, from time to time, as one of the shepherds, I think it is important that we speak out and sound the alarm to help you, brothers and sisters in Christ, to be aware of movements and events that are impacting Christians, that require thought, and sometimes require some resistance and speaking up; and we do not want you to get trapped in something that is unproductive. So we understand that is *part* of the responsibility of caring for souls (see Acts 20:28).

The steady diet that we feed here is what it *has to be*, according to Scripture: preaching the Word of God consistently (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2), consecutively (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Acts 20:20, 27), in a manner that "build[s] you up" in the "faith" (Acts 20:32; Jude 20) and helps you find "wisdom" that only God can give (Prov. 2:6; 2 Tim. 3:15).

And if you are not familiar with what we do, week in and week out—well, you are going to hear *part* of a message this week; I want you to come back next week and hear the rest of it; and then, probably one more week, and we will finish the "New Year" part. And then come back: We are going to be returning to our series through the Book of Acts, and I want you to pick it up with us there. That is our regular diet (see Matt. 4:4; Rom. 15:4; 1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Pet. 2:2). So, what we are going to do today and the next couple of Sundays—think of it as a dietary supplement. It can address an issue where you might get caught in a deficiency of knowing what you need to know to deal with something.

Something different this year: I am not only going to caution you about some dangerous things, and try to equip you to deal with them in an effective way, but I am going to begin—and it is going to take today and next Sunday, at least—I'm going to begin with something *very good* and very useful that will help you deal with everything else, and that will help you *help one another* deal with everything else.

We know that our culture is careening headlong down the path of moral and spiritual destruction (see Rom. 1:28-32; 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13). Somebody used the term "moral rot" when those three college professors refused to say that on their campuses it wasn't okay to say, "Exterminate all the Jews!" Somebody said the "moral rot" has reached the top. So I'm going to use their term: The "moral rot" in our society *is* epidemic.

We who stand for truth and holiness and dignity and the Gospel of Jesus Christ—our views are less and less welcome in the public exchange of ideas (Jn. 15:19). We who stand for Jesus Christ in our country—we are, just in the last few decades, *beginning* to experience what *most* Christians in *most* countries throughout 2,000 years of the history of the Church have lived with. In our country, we are no longer a majority. Our worldview is not respected as it used to be, let alone being the dominant worldview in the culture at large. *And* it is not even being *tolerated* in many circles of academia and public life.

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Now, in other nations—many of them—Christians are being killed, and more than ever. The most *dangerous* year to be a Christian in the history of the Church was last year, and it will probably be worse this coming year. We don't necessarily *feel* that in our society—still somewhat insulated from those things. The persecution that is *here* is more subtle, but it is *growing*—and it is growing at an ever-faster rate. And we need to be strong and wise servants of God where He has placed us to be His "ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20).

We are going to touch on several passages as we dive in; and I want to set the stage for you, if we can:

What does God call you and me to do in the face of the "schemes" of the Evil One (2 Cor. 2:11), who wants to destroy everything good (Jn. 8:44), and neutralize Christians the best he can (1 Pet. 5:8)?

Well, it isn't hard to figure out what He wants of us. Over in Ephesians Chapter 6—a passage familiar to you, I'm sure—notice the emphasis here, notice the commands here: "Finally, *be strong* in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to *stand firm* against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to *resist in the evil day*"—that is when we are alive, my friends—"and having done everything, to *stand firm*. *Stand firm* therefore..." (vss. 10-14, NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

In a very similar context in a different letter that the Apostle Paul wrote, he said the same thing in different words to other friends in the city of Corinth: Second Corinthians 10, Verses 3 through 5—"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are *destroying speculations* and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God..."

Do we have any "speculations" in our world that are being "raised up" that we need to battle against, like: "A man can become a woman, or a woman can become a man"? That is so *patently absurd*, and yet we have people that *genuinely, truly* believe that! And they *don't* need our scorn, they *don't* need our ridicule, they *don't* need our hatred—they *need our Lord*! We have to be "destroying" those "speculations"! And he continues: "and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." That's my sermon title: "Take Every Thought Captive."

I have been told that the theme for our Vacation Bible School for this year will be: "Taking Every Thought Captive." But I need to take care of *you*, because most of you are not eligible to register for VBS—there is a *blatant* age discrimination thing going on there! So I will talk to you about it now, and then you can compare notes with your kids in July.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, God asks *nothing less* than that you "be strong," "stand firm," "resist in the evil day," and "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

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Now, after gathering all these things all through this past year, I finally landed on three categories in which I hope to provide help for us as we walk through another year. Let's "Take Every Thought Captive." And eventually, in the next few weeks, I want to give you Help For:

- Number 1: Being And Making Disciples
- Number 2: Living In A Hostile Culture
- Number 3: Surviving a Presidential Election Year

I expect the first point to be about three times the size of the second, and the second to be about three times the size of the third. And we are just going to get started today, and *maybe* finish Point Number 1 next week. You know, Scott and I have been good-naturedly kidding each other about our multiple alliterated, multi-point outlines. That is *kind of* an outline of where I *think* we might go in the next three weeks. You may never see it again, alright? Just buckle up and walk with me; I think you will find this helpful.

We are going to start with Help For Being And Making Disciples.

And I want to remind you of the passages that I chose for our Scripture reading today:

Matthew Chapter 22. It's the last week of Jesus' life. He is in the Temple. The Sadducees have come and tried to trip Him up; He just *completely* humiliated them in their arguments against Him, so the Pharisees came up, and they sent one of their best guys—one of their ones trained in all of the laws and their add-ons to the laws; and he wanted to trick Jesus up. They had this idea that if you can get the *one* most important [commandment], maybe you'll get a little "King's X" on the rest of them. And so this guy comes up and says, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him—"Deuteronomy Chapter 6, Verse 5—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it—"Leviticus 19:18—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." That *summarizes* everything. You can even take the Ten Commandments and break them down into: "Love God"; "Love your neighbor as yourself"—the first four and the last six.

Now, I *know* that if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you agree with what Jesus says about the foremost and greatest commandment and the *second* foremost.

But I *also* know that every day, you *battle* to make *sure* that you love God *above everything else*, that you "take every thought captive," and you "love your neighbor" as much as you "love yourself." I *know* you battle that! (see Matt. 26:41; Gal. 5:17)

Philippians 1, Verse 6—"I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (cf. Jer. 32:40; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:8). And then in the next chapter: "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:12-13; cf. Ezek. 36:27).

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I *know* that if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand that God has "begun" a "work in you." You understand that He has transformed you (2 Cor. 5:17), that He has changed your destiny from Hell to Heaven (Eph. 2:3-6; Col. 1:13), and He has "begun" this work in you that He will *relentlessly* continue (Jn. 15:2b); and it is *His* work, and it is for "His good pleasure" (Eph. 1:5, 9, NKJV).

But I *also* know that *every day*, it is *so easy* to be tempted to concentrate on *any number* of things *other than* keeping it your highest priority to "work out" the reality of your salvation with "fear and trembling" in the eyes of God, the way that He desires to "work in you." (see Heb. 12:1)

And that brings us to our next verse we read, which is thematic for what we are going to say today: Romans 15:14—"And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another."

Now, I know that if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand that through Him God has changed your "heart" (Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 36:26; Acts 16:14)—He has given you the awareness of what is good, and He has given you *desire* for good things (Deut. 30:6; Lk. 8:15; 2 Thess. 1:11). He has given you the knowledge of His ways through His Word (Prov. 2:6; 9:10; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

But I *also* know that you are like *me*: You don't always *make* the wisest and best decisions (Jas. 3:2).

That is *why* God has made it so that in the church—where we are the family of God on Earth (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), where we are the "body of Christ" on Earth (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:18, 24)—we are, to use those words, "able also to admonish one another."

You understand "one another"—that's me and you and everybody else around. The key word there is the word "admonish." It comes from a rather sophisticated Greek word—*noutheteō*—which is a compound of two words: the word *nous* is the word for "mind," "understanding," or "reason." The other part of that word is from the verb *tithēmi*, which means "to put." So, "to admonish" means "to put something into mind"—to help someone think the right way. To admonish yourself is to learn to think the right way.

One of the best New Testament lexicons defines *noutheteō* as: "to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct; admonish, warn, or instruct." (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 679). It is mutual problem solving—that's all that "admonishing" is (Heb. 10:24). It is not just *scolding*, it's helping (cf. Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:1; 2 Thess. 3:15).

And the word translated "able" is a Greek word that means "to possess the capability for experiencing or doing something"—"I *can*" or "I am able" or "I am capable of this thing."

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It is as concept that is found throughout the New Testament, but Romans 15:14 is the *clearest* statement of the fact that the advice and the help and the support and the encouragement that we need from God in order to live effectively for His glory is available to us in His Word (Jos. 1:8; Ps. 19:11; 119:24, 98-100), *and* believers are able to *help other believers* deal with the things that they face (Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14).

Now, as I said: If you are looking for a logical outline, go somewhere else today. But this is logical; we *are* going somewhere.

I want you to think back—and maybe you remember this: I know some of you were not on the planet yet, but in 1970, Dr. Jay Adams wrote an extremely important and influential book in the Christian world titled "Competent to Counsel." That was 53 years ago; this book is *still* going strong—it has now been through over 30 printings. The gist of the book from this pastor and seminary professor is a call to Christians in general—and pastors and elders in particular, as the ones who train and disciple others—for us all to realize and act upon the fact that the Bible contains *everything* you need "for life and godliness"—those are the *exact words* of Second Peter Chapter 1, Verse 3—and that understanding and applying what God says in His Word will "equip" you "for every good work"—that is Second Timothy 3:17, right after the "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable..." Why? To "equip you for every good work."

At the time at Adams wrote "Competent to Counsel," there was a great big theological battle just erupting. It was the battle over the inerrancy of Scripture (Ps. 12:6; 119:128, 151, 160; Prov. 30:5; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Lk. 16:17; Jn. 17:17). It actually erupted into the public knowledge in the Christian world in 1976 in a book titled "The Battle For The Bible." That was a *profoundly* impactful book in my life. That book called out people—especially seminary professors and pastors who were signing doctrinal statements that said they believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant, and then, for example, they would *teach* that Genesis 1 through 11 *does not mean* what Genesis 1 through 11 says; and they were doing that in a number of places.

That book and the kerfuffle it caused led to the formation of a group called the International Council On Biblical Inerrancy. I know some of the ones who served on that council. That group gave themselves a ten-year window. Have you *ever* seen an organization start, and say, "We are going to go out of existence in ten years"? They did. They tackled the subject of inerrancy; they talked about it, preached about it, wrote about it, interacted about it, and formed some absolutely fantastic documents still very much in effect. They defined and defended the Doctrine of Inerrancy. And I was at the conference in Washington, D.C., when then *officially* put themselves out of existence. It was *glorious*.

And they have not had to re-form. They have *kept* everything, but nobody has had to come back, because as the for inerrancy was being laid to rest, what was going on was the *next* wave, and the people who were speaking out of both sides of their mouths theologically were no longer attacking the Doctrine of Inerrancy. It came in the next phase, which was the battle for the *sufficiency* of Scripture. Not only *say* you believe it is from God, but that you believe what it says about itself (e.g., Ps. 19:7-11; 119:98-100).

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There are many preachers and teachers and authors—and these days, bloggers and podcasters and broadcasters—who affirm the inerrancy of the Bible; but in practice, they *deny* that it means what it says that it can do for you (Ps. 1:2-3; Mic. 2:7b).

There are two primary avenues of assault on the sufficiency of Scripture:

One of them is the people who talk about God giving revelation *beyond* the Bible, *outside* of the Bible: Like, "God speaks to you in prayer"—which is 180 degrees *opposite* of the definition of prayer; *you* speak to God in prayer. Or, "God speaks to you in 'still, small voices,' He gives you these inner impressions." We have talked about a lot of those things; that is not going to be our focus for today.

The *other* assault on inerrancy is what Jay Adams first addressed in "Competent to Counsel." This is how the people who miss the point say it: It is the idea that the Bible is essential for understanding the Gospel—"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4); "Believe in [Him] and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31)—okay, the Bible is essential for that; but when it comes to dealing with *emotional* matters, or so-called "mental health" matters, the Bible and the church have to be *subordinated* to "mental health experts."

Now, I was faced with this idea long ago. I was in a seminary class—and ironically, just a couple of weeks ago, I was looking for something else in my files, and I ran across the syllabus from this portion of this class that was the portion on "Pastoral Counselling," it was called. It was taught by one of the *niciest* professors I ever had—a really kind, loving, caring brother in Christ. But he told us that pastors—and he was talking to future pastors—are *not* able to deal with the problems of certain people. He instructed us that when someone is depressed or dealing with chronic anxiety or crippling fear—like agoraphobia, where you're scared to go out of your house—or abuse of alcohol or drugs, all such people should be referred *out of the church* to mental health professionals such as licensed family counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Now, though he did not use the expression, he was teaching us: Pastors are *not competent to counsel*. Christians, in general, are *not competent to counsel*—at least, for most important things.

Now, I had only known the Lord for about five years at that time. I was quite new to ministry. I had not read "Competent to Counsel" yet. This class *provoked* me to go hunt up and read "Competent to Counsel." But that didn't *sit* very well with me. This was the kind of professor who was not real autocratic; you could converse with him, and we had a pretty congenial class. And so, I politely challenged him in the class with some rather obvious passages, like, "You know that Second Peter 1:3 says that God 'has given to us' everything we need 'for life and godliness'? It sounds like you would change that to 'some things we need for life and godliness, but not quite everything.' Or, Second Timothy 3: The Word of God will 'equip you for every good work—well, except the ones for the *hard* problems.' Or Romans 15: 'You' are 'also able to admonish one another,' but what you really mean by that is, 'Well, some of you are maybe a little more able than others, but you are *not* all 'able to admonish one another.' " I said, "It sounds to me like you are saying the Bible does not mean what it says."

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And he answered very politely, very kindly—and I have to say: with all the *genuineness* he possibly could have had; I *don't* think he was winking or crossing his fingers behind his back. His answer was that, "I *want* people to grow spiritually; I *want* people to be able to come to your church and be *fed* from the pulpit and in your Bible studies and in your fellowship groups; but for many people, it *is not possible* for them to receive what the Bible teaches until they *first* deal with their deep emotional problems—and that has to come through the world of psychology and psychiatry."

So, we were to refer all the hard cases to the "experts." And he also elaborated and said, "There are a lot of people who are *not able* to deal with matters of sin in their lives until they *first* get healthy psychologically." So, their *feelings* have to be changed before they are *even able* to receive what the Bible says about "sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn. 16:8) and a "Savior" (2 Tim. 1:10). That was one of two low points in my seminary training. I'm not telling you the other one today.

This very kind, caring, genuine brother in Christ *did not realize* he was *contradicting essential doctrine!* He was subtly teaching us that some people are incapable of receiving what God has for them until they *first* clean up something else from another source besides God's Word (contra Jn. 13:8b; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22). He was subtly undermining the Doctrine of Salvation: To say that dealing with sin is *inappropriate* for some people (contra Jer. 23:22; Ezek. 18:30; 33:11; Mk. 1:15; 6:12; Acts 17:30; 22:16; 26:18, 20), and that is not the right way to minister to them, is to say: The Gospel is not the first and most important message everyone needs to hear!

I mean, that poor, antiquated Apostle Paul—he would just *barge* into town, go to the synagogue, and start *preaching the Gospel*; and tell people, "You crucified the Savior! And He died for you, and He rose again! Put your faith in Him!" And then, when he got kicked out of there, leading as many to Christ as he could, he would go to the Gentiles and do *exactly* the same thing again! Poor Paul, and the first 1,800 years of the Church—they *didn't know* they have to send them to the *psychologist first*, before they are *able* to hear about sin and a Savior!

He was subtly teaching us that some sins—such as drunkenness and drug abuse and certain sexual perversions—*cannot be overcome* directly by the Gospel (contra Ezek. 36:25; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:9-11; 2 Pet. 1:4).

He was subtly teaching us that Hebrews 4:12—"the word of God is...able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"—well, only for *some* people, not for everybody.

Now, I think a disclaimer needs to be made. I thought about where to put it in here, and I could not find *any* place, so I think I will stick it about the middle, and maybe you'll hear it, alright? So, pause for a moment; here is the disclaimer: We want to make it very clear that we understand: There are *some* physical conditions which include troublesome and difficult emotional and attitudinal side effects, even *behavioral* side effects. Some of them are things like traumatic brain injury; drug interactions, be it prescription or recreational drugs; brain diseases like Alzheimer's, late stages of degenerative conditions; hormonal aberrations; and there are others—you get what I'm saying. Any competent,

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conscientious biblical counselor will *always* include advice: "Go get a *physical* exam and bloodwork to find or rule out *physical* problems that may be causing or exacerbating negative emotions and behaviors." And when there is a diagnosed physical disease or injury, it needs to be treated *medically* (Matt. 9:12). The people who claim to do Biblical Counseling, and then they tell you to stay away from doctors and to eschew *all* medications (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:23)—*that is irresponsible*, and it is *not* the practice of anyone who is well-trained in Biblical Counseling.

Now, there are some things I can't help you with. I mean, if you have a broken leg, I feel really sorry for you. That hurts like crazy! *You don't want me messing with your leg*, alright? Go to the orthopedist and get that taken care of. And if you have cancer, I will pray for you—I can't *get it out of you*. Keep the boundaries where they need to be.

And *sometimes*, even in the realm of those less than overtly clear physical things, sometimes medication and even hospitalization might be necessary for a person's immediate safety. But *never* is it to be to the *exclusion* of loving ministry of biblical compassion and comfort and exhortation. If you have someone who is just *completely* out of control, you might need medicine to bring them down—but then you don't say, "Okay, problem solved!" No, "Problem not *found* yet." We have to figure out the root of that thing.

And so, *every* Christian needs to be "admonished" when wrong thinking is taking place, and that is part of our ministry to each other. Now, back to our regularly scheduled message. I just want to make sure you understand there that this is not an anti-medicine, anti-doctor viewpoint that we are espousing here.

Jay Adams became the de-facto grandfather of what is now known as this "Biblical Counseling Movement." And by the way: I had the privilege to be in the room with Jay Adams every day for a couple of weeks in a class that I took in my D. Minn. Program. And I had read his book, and you know—he even used some big words, and it is a fairly thick book, and this guy is serious. And I got into class, and it was in a summer session. He shows up in a Hawaiian shirt and some sort of moccasin shoes. He *loves* to laugh! When I call him the "grandfather" of the movement, he is like the grandpa you hope you have—or, you hope you will be. He was an interesting guy.

Well, he started what is now the "Biblical Counseling Movement." *He* used the label "Nouthetic Counseling"—I mean, he knew Greek; "nouthetic" is a very, very good word. It was based upon that word that is translated "admonished," and I gave you the definition of it earlier. Dr. Adams started an organization called "NANC"—the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors; he started that in 1976. *Great* idea! *Great* organization! *Great* fruit! But *nobody* knew what "nouthetic" means.

So eventually, after many more have contributed to this helpful and much-needed ministry in the Body of Christ that transcends denominations and many otherwise normal boundaries, the name of the organization was changed to "ACBC"—the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, and that is the organization we primarily work with. There are others. There's also "IBCD"—the "Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship."

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ACBC offers certification for Biblical Counseling. "Certification"—that means: Somebody who knows what they are doing has taught you and tested you, and confirmed that you know what you are doing, so here is your certificate; you are "certified" now to do that. Now, you have to do that to offer certain pieces of equipment, like an automobile: You have to be "certified"; you call it a driver's "license." So this is just training people to do this ministry.

The course work is usually done online, and it is usually self-directed—you can determine the pace of it. After you finish the course work, there are some comprehensive examinations. And then, the program concludes with 50 sessions of supervised counseling. They get you involved right away in *doing* counseling, or *assisting* others who are doing counseling, with good guidance; but in the end, you do 50 hours on your own that is observed and critiqued. And you become pretty good at what you are doing.

The program takes approximately two years for most people to complete, unless you are in an accelerated program. Our Gracie Nelson did it in a Master's Degree program at the Master's University, and got all the way through the certification process in about half of that time.

This is the organization we work with primarily in our Biblical Counseling. Here at Heritage Bible Church, we haven't tooted the horn about it a lot, but we have people at various stages in that process—from thinking about it to investigating it to dabbling in it to just beginning to systematically pursue it to fully certified and now publishing articles, even, for ACBC.

The definition of Biblical Counseling is this, and this is one of the things for you to take away today: Biblical Counseling is the ministry through which we, as Christians, help ourselves and help one another grow in understanding and living out the good work of God in our lives and in our church. Listen again: Biblical Counseling is the ministry through which we, as Christians, help ourselves and help one another grow in understanding and living out the good work of God in our lives and in our church.

So, if you are struggling to live as a Christian—[you have] good intentions (Matt. 26:41b), but if you are struggling with finding the joy and the peace that you wish you had, *we want to help!* We want to help *one another*.

There is a great tendency, when you are struggling, to *pull away* from the church—which I *guarantee*, in every situation, will *always make it worse!* We need each other! That's when we need to *run to the Lord!* That's when we need to *run to our brothers and sisters in Christ!* What does it mean, "Help the weak, encourage the fainthearted, be patient with everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14)? You can't do that with somebody who won't let you get near them! You need to be on both ends of giving and receiving those things (Ecc. 4:9-10).

Now, I'm going to say more next week, but I'm going to give you a spoiler alert: I am praying specifically that God will give *many more* in our church family the desire to explore training for Biblical Counseling. I would encourage you to go to ACBC's website. If you can't remember how to spell ACBC, it's *biblicalcounseling.com*.

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I want to that website. I have been reading this stuff for a long time. *I wrote a course* on Biblical Counseling for training Russian pastors. I have *taught it* over there twice, and taught a follow-up class on Biblical Counseling. And I looked at this website today and said, "Oh, I wish I had seen that ten years ago, or eight years ago when I wrote that manual." There is an *incredible* array of great tools there.

And I would also encourage you to consider testing the waters. Look at some of the videos that are there. Maybe even go to YouTube. Just make sure you don't do "*Christian Counseling*"—do "*Biblical Counseling*" and look for—you have to remember how to spell it: ACBC. Maybe look at some of the training. You are going to be *fascinated!* It will reverberate with your heart. And maybe *take* that first level of training.

And do I have a deal for you! Now, someday this is going to be heard online, or it is going to be heard on the radio—so this will be *totally* irrelevant, chronologically. But, for *you*, the first weekend of February, first weekend of March, first weekend of April, on Friday night and all day Saturday of those weekends, you can take the first 30 hours of the ACBC training—not online, but *in person*, with some of the *finest* teachers in the world, *here* in the Treasure Valley. It is going to be hosted by one of our sister churches.

If you are interested in sticking your foot in that water, see me; or Scott Freeman, who heads up our Biblical Counseling ministry here; or Scott Basolo; or Gracie Nelson, who is our fully-licensed one. This is something, by the way, that we are *strongly urging* for those who serve in leadership at HBC.

Now, Scott Freeman has one of those *nasty* little bugs that cannot be cured by Biblical Counseling: This week he is not here. But lest he slap me next time he sees me, he wanted me to say: *We especially need men* in this category. That doesn't mean, "Ladies, you are not welcome." (see Titus 2:3-5) But we *especially* need male Biblical Counselors. So, think on that. Pray about that.

And I *also* want to say: Even if you *never* have a formal appointment with *anyone* for the purpose of doing Biblical Counseling, you would profit *tremendously* from *any* part of this training. It will teach you to self-counsel—basically, that means: grow in the Lord, to mature in Christ. And it will help you in ways that will help you apply God's Word to your own life and *all* of your relationships.

Every time I have been around *any* of this training in *any* context, it seems like, within the next week, I'm having a conversation with somebody, and something that I heard is *immediately* applicable! You don't have to say, "Now, let's make an appointment for Tuesday at Five, and here are the forms to fill out." It's *life!* It is *being* and "*mak[ing]* disciples" (Matt. 28:19).

Now, what kinds of things are we talking about here? I started thinking this week: "What are the things most often addressed and overcome through Biblical Counseling? I came up with a list off the top of my head, and then this morning as I was reading over my list, I thought, "Oh, you left out...Oh, you left out..."—so I got some more, too.

Sermon Title: Take Every Thought Captive (New Year 2024, #1)
Scripture Text: Various

Speaker: Jim Harris
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But, for example, some of the most common ones are: fear, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, marriage conflicts, isolation—feeling isolated from people, anger, bitterness, maybe a habit that is out of control, adult children who are not walking with Christ—and you could put before that: children who *need* to walk with Christ. Parenting issues are very common to be helped by brothers and sisters in Christ. And then, one of the *saddest* phenomena in our world: adult children *ghosting* Christian parents because they are rejecting the message. There is also: lack of assurance of salvation—doubting one's salvation, recurring feelings of guilt, learning to deal with a chronic illness—whether it is you or a loved one: How do you deal with that, how do you *appropriate* the resources God has given you to deal with that? Grief, intrusive thoughts—you know, you're just going along doing your thing, and *all of a sudden*, you're thinking about *that!* *Where did that come from?* How do you deal with things like that? Or, obsessive behavior—the psychologists call it "Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder." That's not something you need a *pill* for! There are *answers* for things like that.

All those things and more are *radically* helped by the simple process of the loving admonishment and Christian-to-Christian relationships of encouragement; and learning to recognize the true spiritual roots of those things, "renewing your mind" in how you think about them (Rom. 12:2), and then replacing them with the right things—that is what we saw in Ephesians 4, the idea that you put off the "old" ways (vs. 22; cf. Col. 3:8-9), you "renew" your "mind" (vs. 23; cf. Col. 3:1-2), and you put on the "new" ways (vs. 24; cf. Col. 3:10).

So, is there a *recurring* pattern of sin in your life that you *just can't seem to break out of?* Well, you are not alone. Let the Body of Christ *help*. We don't mean that we are going to stand up at the end of the service, and you tell us what your "besetting sin" is (cf. Heb. 12:1). No, that's not what we are talking about. Let the Body of Christ help. Maybe even consider *learning how* to be the one who helps!

Is there someone in your life that you are—well, *afraid of?* Or is there someone in your life whom you love, who is *avoiding* you? I should mention right after the holidays: Is there someone in *your family* that you can't stand to be with? Let the Body of Christ help; and maybe even consider learning how to be the one who does the helping.

A *very* common response from people who receive *any part* of the ACBC training is: "Wow! I needed this for *myself!*" And then, when God has used His Word and His people to minister to *your* heart, guess what? It is kind of like Second Corinthians Chapter 1, Verse 4: The "comfort" of God, we use "to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." *Comforting is contagious!* And one way to label that is: Biblical Counseling.

Now, in my outline, we are approximately halfway through the point that I haven't even defined yet, what it might be. But next time, we will talk about some of the most *basic* and universally-applicable principles of Biblical Counseling. I'll give you some things that you can use to help *yourself*, and then help someone else. I will give you some of those next week.

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And also, I want you to learn the crucial distinction between Psychology and Biblical Counseling, and I want you to avoid being confused when something is labeled "*Christian Counseling*." That seminary professor called what he did "*Christian Counseling*." It was *worldly* psychology with a *worldly* anti-biblical view of what a man is, and some Bible verses attached. That is not Biblical Counseling (1 Cor. 3:19; 2:6-8, 13; 2 Cor. 1:12). We will help you sort that out.

What is "mental health"? What is "mental illness"? And how does Biblical Counseling deal with mental illnesses that we are so accustomed to talking about?

Well, I decided that it would be really good to finish with a little bit from Psalm 19, but some preacher went way to long, already. That will be good next week, too. It's okay with me if you want to go pore over Psalm 19 during this week.

But, lets pray:

Our Father, we pray so simply: Teach us to apply Your Word well. Teach us to bring "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Teach us to help one another overcome trials and tests, and to not be stuck in behavior that keeps us from Your best. I pray that You will fan the flames among us in this church family to be ever more able to receive Your counsel, and ever more able to "admonish one another." And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.