**Same Problem, Different People:**

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**A Case Study**

**Introductory Thoughts**

“The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” Proverbs 20:5

**Main Point**

Human experience is full of trouble. How a person understands that trouble—the meaning he ascribes to it—reveals something deep about him. It reveals the structures of belief, value, and commitment that shape his perception. The troubles of life, in fact, often serve to reveal things a person wouldn’t otherwise see in herself.

* Counseling involves helping people explore how they are perceiving their trouble, then guiding them to consider how God’s perspective reinforces, expands, or corrects their own. While we could never know the entirety of God’s perspective, Scripture does reveal the core beliefs, values, and commitments that should shape our perception.
* So even though Scripture may not directly address the specific trouble a person is enduring, it does provide the framework they need to respond faithfully to it. In this way, counseling can be an instrument of spiritual formation in the context of a person’s troubles.

**Two Mini Case Studies**

Example of two drug users in their early 30’s, both living in a parent’s basement, both unable to hold jobs, both living on video games, dealing with similar depression and anxiety.

* Jared came from an upper middle class home. His mom and dad, Carol and Bill, were both driven people—professionally, socially, and even at church. They lived fast paced lives, which had the benefit of Jared getting everything he wanted. Even college was paid for before he dropped out. His dad Bill had one awkward talk with Jared about applying himself better when he found out his son wasn’t attending classes. But that was two years ago. Since then, he started casually using marijuana he could get from his friends, which has hardened into regular use. He hides it from his parents, complaining that he is just depressed all the time. Now, Carol and Bill don’t know what to do with their depressed son other than let him live in the basement, where his hours are passed online gaming.

* Michael came from a working poor home. He was raised by his grandma Rebecca because no one knew who his dad was, and his mom was a drug user. Rebecca had deep faith in the Jesus Christ and took Michael to church regularly. Michael was smart and studious, but began to hang with the wrong crowd in the later years of high school. Casual marijuana use led to more involvement in the drug scene. He ended up graduating high school, but his grades were so bad, he gave up on any of the scholarship programs he once hoped for. It seemed over for him. He has moved out a few times from Rebecca’s basement, but always ends up back there. Now, Rebecca doesn’t know what to do with her depressed grandson other than let him live in the basement, where his hours are passed online gaming.

**Refresher of What You’re Looking For**

**Context** – the external factors that condition response

* + Circumstances
  + Other People
  + Self
  + God

**Response** – the heart’s active perception of and activity in context

* + Cognitive beliefs and thoughts
  + Affective desires and emotions
  + Volitional commitments and choices

**Method of Approaching These Two Men**

**1. Listen to the problem.** You want to know what is going on, but people often share their troubles haphazardly, piling up details in an unorganized lump. You can sort things into smaller piles and help a person organize what he is saying for clarity’s sake.

CONTEXT: What are the influencing factors of Circumstances, Other People, Self, and God?

**2. Consider heart responses.** After you’ve found out the basics of what’s going on, you want to consider how the person’s heart is dynamically responding in each of these areas. His responses will be characterized by faith or by many other things—fear, anger, discouragement, lust, indulgence, escape, ignorance, sadness, disappointment, discontentment, suspicion.

RESPONSE: How are they responding to Circumstances, Other People, Self, and God?

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**3. Speak the truth in love**.Speaking accurately to the need of the heart comes only after listening and considering. A pastor knows whether to teach, comfort, warn, encourage, advise, and admonish from Scripture based on the person’s heart responses. The goal is to call a person to faith in a way that specifically addresses their heart responses, since faith alone is the means by which a person responds rightly (Heb 11:6,13-16, 12:1-2). And faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). This is why counseling must be biblical.

SCRIPTURE: From Scripture, what is God’s perspective of their Circumstances, Other People, Self, and God himself?

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