



Grace Communion Seminary

CM503 – Christian Counseling

Short Syllabus

(updated April 2022)

Instructor: Ted Johnston

Course Description

This course examines a multi-disciplinary approach to counseling drawing on insights from Scripture, incarnational Trinitarian theology, and psychology regarding God, humanity (including sin, human change and well-being) and Christian ministry. Application of these insights is then made to the practice of short-term, church-based counseling ministries that participate effectively, through the Holy Spirit, in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ, the “wonderful counselor.”

To do well in this course, you will need to put in about 12-13 hours each week.

Required Texts

- Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, third edition. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. ISBN 13 9-781-4185-0329-1 (sells for about \$25; Kindle edition available).
- Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling Casebook*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. ISBN 978-1-4185-1660-4 (sells for about \$24).
- McMinn, Mark R. *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling (an integrative paradigm)*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8308-2851-7 (sells for about \$18; Kindle edition available).

Supplemental Texts (not required, but recommended)

- Benner, David G. *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: a Short-Term Structured Model*, second edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- McMinn, Mark R. *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2011.
- Wright, H. Norman. *Crisis Counseling: What to Do During the First 72 Hours*. San Bernardino: Here’s Life, Inc., 1985.

Course Objectives

1. This course applies the insights of incarnational Trinitarian theology to the practice of counseling within the church setting, using a thoroughly Christian approach that is multi-disciplinary in nature. Fundamental to this approach is viewing counseling as a real participation in the healing ministry that the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Jesus Christ is doing through his ongoing relationship, in the Spirit, with both the counselee and the counselor. This course will benefit those who provide short-term counseling services within the church, including pastors, youth ministers, lay-counselors, etc.
2. The course begins with an overview of the nature of humanity (sin, human change dynamics, etc.) and of various approaches to counseling. This theoretical base is then applied to real-life pastoral counseling challenges, with an emphasis on the counselor's skill-set and alternative counseling approaches. Also included is an examination of counseling ethics, including the critical issues of counseling boundaries and referrals.
3. The course mirrors the relational approach to counseling that this course advocates. It does so through an online dialog between students and with the course instructor as the class interacts in learning community. The course includes a variety of assigned readings, and places significant emphasis on students' responses to those readings posted to the online discussion forum.

Student Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will:

1. Explain the dynamics of the counseling process and the importance of those dynamics in short-term, church-based, Christian counseling.
2. Describe how to participate in the ministry of Jesus, "the wonderful counselor" as he, through the Holy Spirit, brings about change in the life of the counselee.
3. Define the nature and scope of the counseling role of pastors and other ministers as they participate in the healing ministry of Jesus.
4. Define and pursue the qualifications and skills necessary to be an effective Christian counselor in a local church setting.

5. Explain the ethical foundations of an appropriate, short-term, church-based Christian counseling ministry, including such critical issues as making referrals and establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries.
6. Explain the dynamics of the counseling process and the importance of those dynamics in short-term, church-based, Christian counseling.

Requirements and Assignments

This *Christian Counseling* course is organized around the ten written lectures from the course instructor. These lead to readings in the two primary textbooks: *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling* (McMinn), and *Christian Counseling*, third edition (Collins). Students will interact with these readings, with each other, and with the instructor, by posting answers to discussion questions on the discussion forum. The questions will typically be keyed to the Collins textbook, utilizing questions posed in *Christian Counseling Casebook* (also by Collins). In this way, the class provides a balance of theory and real-life application in a relational/dialogic setting not unlike the counseling process itself.

In addition to answers to questions posted online, students will write two papers—a short summary paper due mid-term, and a final research paper due at the end of the course.

The *Christian Counseling* course assignments are summarized in this chart:

Course assignments summary		
Week number	Theme for the week (that week's lecture title)	Assignments for the week
1	Worldview and Christian Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 1 • Read McMinn, pp.1-32 • Read Collins (Guide), pp. 3-45 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 3-19 • Post on the discussion forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A short biography - Answers to questions at the end of lecture 1
2	Understanding the role and the scope of Christian counseling (counseling ethics, including making referrals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 2 • Read McMinn, pp. 33-91 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.46-99 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 21-35 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 2
3	Characteristics of effective counselors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 3 • Read McMinn, pp.92-102 • Read Collins (Guide), pp. 827-863 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp.229-243 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 3
4	Counseling processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 4 • Read McMinn, pp. 103-125 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.100-157 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 4

5	Understanding and facilitating change, part 1 (including the nature of different addiction-prone personalities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 5 • Read McMinn, pp. 126-147 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.158-209 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 55-68 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 5
6	Understanding and facilitating change, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 6 • Read McMinn, pp. 148-163 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.315-338; 425-440 • Read Collins (Casebook), p.95-100; 127-130 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 6 • Submit a 3-page long mid-term summary paper that recaps what you have learned in the class to date
7	Understanding and facilitating change, part 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 7 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.544-567; 587-630 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 157-162; 169-178 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 7
8	Change case studies, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 8 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.633-700 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 179-194. • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 8

9	Change case studies, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 9 • Read Collins (Guide), pp.745-761; 803-826 • Read Collins (Casebook), pp. 209-214; 225-228 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 9
10	Debrief: insights from class interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read lecture 10 • Post on the discussion forum answers to questions at the end of lecture 10
11-12	Final research paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a 15 page final research paper that addresses the material presented in the course, demonstrating critical thinking grounded in an incarnational Trinitarian worldview. Due by Sunday night of week 12.

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting			
Assignment	Number of pages	Estimated hours (average student)	Percent of final grade
Course lectures	50	8	
McMinn textbook	163	11	
Collins (Guide) textbook	442	30	
Online readings		4	
Online discussion forum: reflections and responses about assigned texts, commenting on classmates' and instructor's posts, participating in online dialog (10 sections; 3 hours average/section)		30	40%
Midterm summary paper	3 pages	10	15%
Final research paper	15 pages	45	45%
Totals		138 hours	100%

Notes:

- 1) The number of hours shown for each assignment is an estimate based on the “average” master’s level student, and adds up to about 12 hours (average) each week of the course (stretching over 12 weeks). A student who reads quickly may be slow in writing papers and vice versa. Some students will complete the course requirements in less time, and some will take more.
- 2) The final course grade will be determined by combining the grades for individual assignments, weighted per the percentages shown above.